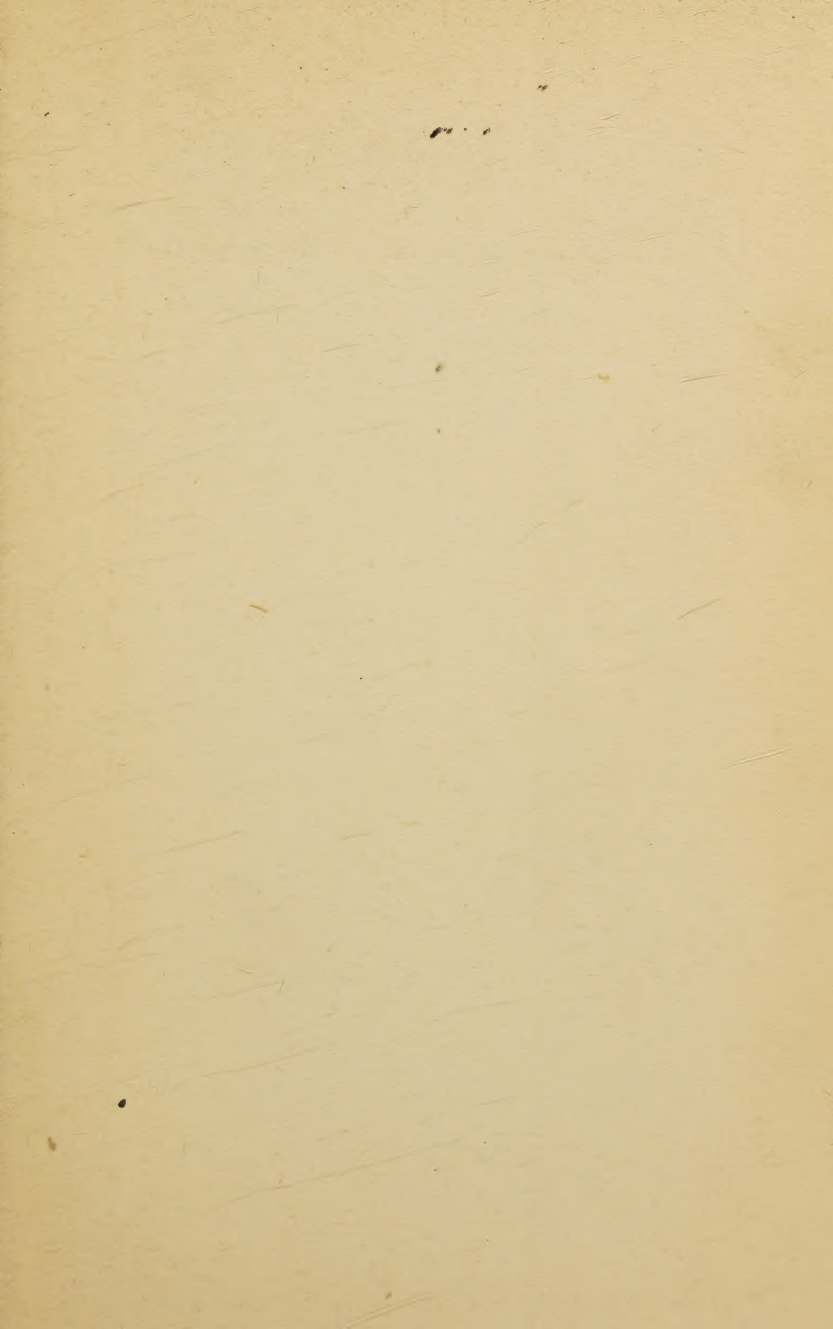


THE ART AND CRAFT
OF THE AUTHOR

C. E. HEISCH





THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE AUTHOR

THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE AUTHOR

PRACTICAL HINTS UPON LITERARY WORK

BY

C. E. HEISCH

"None but an author knows an author's cares,
Or Fancy's fondness for the child she bears."

COWPER.

NEW YORK
THE GRAFTON PRESS

1906

Dedication.

EMERSON TELLS US
THAT "OUR CHIEF WANT IN LIFE
IS SOME ONE WHO SHALL MAKE US DO WHAT WE CAN."
TO THE FRIENDS, OLD AND NEW,
WHO HAVE PERFORMED THIS SERVICE FOR THE
PRESENT WRITER, THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS DEDICATED,
WITHOUT PERMISSION, BUT WITH GRATITUDE.

29599

PREFACE

“**M**OST books are bad, and ought not to have been written.” So says Schopenhauer; and however far we may be from endorsing the sweeping assertion of a professed pessimist, it must, nevertheless, be freely admitted that, of the large number of books which pour daily from the Press, very few reach the highest standard of excellence. And the reason of this is not far to seek. It is not that the art of the author is an exceptionally difficult one, but rather, that it is supposed to be so easy, that it may be practised without any preliminary study or preparation.

The number of those who desire to write for the Press is continually on the increase; but, unhappily, there is a very general opinion that one great advantage of the author's calling is

that he requires nothing for his equipment but pens, ink, and paper.

Yet, surely, every workman needs something beyond the implements of his craft; he must, at least, have the skill to use them. But something more than this is needed by the author, for his implements are not mere tools, by means of which some material result is to be achieved; they are, ultimately, a means of expression; and how will it fare with him if he have nothing to express?

The first thing, then, which the author needs is SOMETHING TO SAY, and next, the skill to say it; and it is these two points which, under various aspects, are discussed in the present volume.

C. E. HEISCH.

CONTENTS



PREFACE	PAGE vii
-------------------	-------------

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY	I
------------------------	---

Object of the volume, to offer help to inexperienced writers—
Instruction not easily obtained—Every author self-taught—All
suggestions based on experience—Principles, rather than
rules, laid down—Best authors consulted.

CHAPTER II

THE AUTHOR'S QUALIFICATIONS	4
---------------------------------------	---

Qualifications of the author—1. The love of truth—Truth in
fiction—Opinions of R. L. Stevenson and F. Norris—2. The
love of work—Essential to excellence—Overcomes difficulties
—R. L. Stevenson—Enlightens—Sir W. Scott—Literature the
product both of head and heart.

CHAPTER III

WORK	II
----------------	----

The literary life a life of labour—Talent no substitute for
work—Example, Sir W. Scott—How to begin—Variations in
the author's powers — Causes — Remedies — Re-writing—
J. R. Green—Plato.

CHAPTER IV

PAGE

EDUCATION AND TRAINING	17
----------------------------------	----

1. Reading for the sake of education—Quality rather than quantity—Effect of books upon the character—Ruskin on reading—The choice of the best—Ignorance of what is best—Power of discriminating between good and bad indispensable to the author—2. Writing learned by writing—Experience of R. L. Stevenson—Importance of criticism—Useful exercises: translation and writing upon matters of fact—Perfection rather than glory.

CHAPTER V

THINKING, AND STIMULUS TO THOUGHT	25
---	----

Difficulty of thinking—Thinking defined as truth-seeking—Experience of the truth-seeker—Thinking a natural, and therefore a slow process—Described by Joubert—Need of mental stimulus—Conversation—Its rarity—A stimulating and transforming influence—Socrates—C. Lamb—Books—Their highest use to inspire—Genius—Originality—Force—Emerson's essays.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHOICE OF A SUBJECT	32
-----------------------------------	----

Two types of author—Those who seek their subjects and those whose subjects seek them—Competing subjects—One subject—Search for a popular subject—Laws of supply and demand inapplicable—Real question, What can the author write?—What he knows and what interests him—On writing without knowledge—On taking advice—Mrs. Gaskell—Dr. John Brown—R. L. Stevenson—Ruskin on the author's true subject.

CHAPTER VII

THE HANDLING OF MATERIALS	40
-------------------------------------	----

Collection and management of material—Materials drawn (1) from life; (2) from written sources—Difficulties presented by

CONTENTS

xi

PAGE

the latter—Advantages of previous knowledge—Reading, note-taking, classification of notes—Plan of the whole—Selection and rejection—Principle of unity—Illustrations from Old Masters and architecture—One central idea—All else subordinate—Contrast C. Dickens with Mr. R. Kipling—Historical biography—Treatment—Material must undergo a change—May be transformed, clothed, idealised, transmuted—R. L. Stevenson—C. Brontë—G. Eliot.

CHAPTER VIII

STYLE 50

The author's manner as important as his matter—The reader's enjoyment dependent upon style—Definitions by M. Arnold, Fénelon, Isaac Disraeli, and Schopenhauer—Style includes the mode of thinking as well as the expression—Style the outcome of character as well as intellect—Infinite variety—Good style may be acquired—Study of classics the best education.

CHAPTER IX

STYLE—OBSCURITY AND CLEARNESS 56

Obscurity the worst fault of style—Some causes of obscurity—Thought not clear—The author's familiarity with his subject—Preponderance of thought over expression—Condensation—Love of epigram—Diffuseness—Obscurity suggestive of hidden treasure—Clearness of style—Clear thought—Definite statement—Simplicity—Method—Natural order—Minds not normally constituted—Arrangement of sentences—Metaphor.

CHAPTER X

STYLE—FORCE 65

Author's object, to carry his reader with him—To this end, force essential—Force includes matter as well as manner—Elements of force—Simplicity, directness, conciseness—True nature of force—Personal influence—Its sources—Strong personality—Conviction, passion, concentration—Carlyle—C. Brontë—Mr. R. Kipling—Control—Example of powerful writing.

CHAPTER XI

	PAGE
STYLE—FINISH	72

Fourfold revision—1. Read the whole aloud—2. Bring into one key—3. Remove ambiguity—4. Strike out unnecessary words—Opening sentences to strike key-note of the whole—Should not be written first—Practical suggestions—Graceful conclusion desirable—Not indispensable—When matter exhausted, any conclusion welcome—Opinion of a competent critic desirable.

CHAPTER XII

ORIGINALITY	78
-----------------------	----

Schopenhauer—Emerson—Carlyle—Originality defies analysis—Comparison between ordinary and original minds—Novelty not essential—Originality an affinity with reality—Carlyle on the original man—Mental vigour—Danger from formalism and unbelief—Dr. Johnson and his worn-out shoes—Symbolic—Originality a gift—May be cultivated—Methods of first author those of all original thinkers—Originality includes both thought and expression—Plagiarism—Charge often undeserved—The same thoughts in many minds—Plagiarist appropriates language as well as thought—Examples of plagiarism—Plot—Illustration—Title.

CHAPTER XIII

INSPIRATION	88
-----------------------	----

The limits of the author's powers—Inspiration (1) the heightening of the author's own powers; (2) an influx of power from without—The experience described—Inspiration necessary to poetry—Testimony of Shelley, Herrick, Emerson, and R. L. Stevenson—Effect of inspiration on art—Its source, the author's own mind—A region outside our consciousness—Slumbering memories—Mental possessions of which we are unconscious—Overflow of the outer circle into the inner.

CHAPTER XIV

PAGE

THE AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE	97
-----------------------------------	----

Special value of experience to the author—1. His exclusive possession—2. It commands a hearing—3. It is often the sole source of knowledge, *e.g.*, the subject of Love—Incapacity for experience—"The experiencing nature"—W. Bagehot—Characteristics of the artistic temperament—Absence of the artistic temperament, *e.g.*, W. Scott—Compare "Waverley" with "Weir of Hermiston"—No genius can dispense with experience—Dante, Goëthe—Mrs. Browning—W. Bagehot on Shakespeare—"Wuthering Heights" the work of genius without experience—Last letter of R. L. Stevenson to Mr. Gosse.

CHAPTER XV

LITERATURE AS A PROFESSION	107
--------------------------------------	-----

An important question—Considerations which determine the answer—Reasons against making literature a means of livelihood—Schopenhauer on writing for money—Either the author or his work must suffer—Carlyle's early struggles—Greatness a bar to immediate success—A second occupation necessary—The true book born, not made—The author's responsibility.

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF AUTHORS QUOTED OR REFERRED TO	115
--	-----

INDEX OF SUBJECTS	117
-----------------------------	-----

The Art and Craft of the Author

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

Object of the volume, to offer help to inexperienced writers—Instruction not easily obtained—Every author self-taught—All suggestions based on experience—Principles, rather than rules, laid down—Best authors consulted.

“Real Literature, like real anything, is Art.”—W. HUNT.

THE following suggestions on the subject of literary work are offered to those who desire to study the art of writing, with a view to the author's career. These, we believe, will not readily meet with the help which they require; for, while all other arts have their professors and accredited teachers, while the greatest masters have had their following of disciples, the author alone makes no attempt to impart his methods, and possibly, from the very nature of the case, could not do so if he would.

2 ART AND CRAFT OF THE AUTHOR

Nor is there much assistance to be found in other quarters. Of the few books which have been written on English Composition, the greater number are school books, while all confine themselves almost exclusively to the technical side of the subject.

From the Professor of Rhetoric, indeed, the young writer may gain many useful hints ; but it should never be forgotten that the difference between the arts of speaking and writing is greater than the resemblance, and that the orator achieves his triumphs by means which are wholly inapplicable to literary work. If any one doubt this, let him inquire how many, or rather how few, of the famous speeches of our greatest orators are read to-day as literature.

It follows, then, since teachers are not to be had, that every writer is, and must be, self-taught. However great may be his natural gifts, they cannot be developed without training and practice ; and the training which he cannot obtain from others he must provide for himself.

Those, however, who are in earnest about their own education are usually glad to avail themselves of the experience of others ; and it is for this reason that the following chapters are written. They promise no royal road to literary success ; they do but indicate certain errors to be avoided and certain objects to be kept in view, with some of the methods by which those objects may be attained. But since every suggestion which they contain is founded upon experience, it is hoped that they will afford some help to those who are trying to help themselves.

Throughout the volume, the object has been less to lay down rules than to point out principles which

every reader can apply for himself. It may be added that, in cases where the subjects under review have been treated by well-known authors, the works of those authors have been consulted and freely drawn upon, and the readers referred to them for further information.

CHAPTER II

THE AUTHOR'S QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifications of the author—1. The love of truth—Truth in fiction—Opinions of R. L. Stevenson and F. Norris—2. The love of work—Essential to excellence—Overcomes difficulties—R. L. Stevenson—Enlightens—Sir W. Scott—Literature the product both of head and heart.

“One must never quit sight of realities.”—JOSEF JOUBERT.

“Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness.”—THOMAS CARLYLE.

BEFORE entering upon the literary career, the wise man will ask himself two questions: first, what are the qualifications necessary to ensure success in that career? and, secondly, whether he himself possesses, or failing this, is able and willing to acquire, those qualifications? To the first of these questions a reply will be attempted here; the second, the intending author must answer for himself.

What, then, are the qualifications essential to an author? To this it may be answered, that these will vary with his special work: that, for example, the primary requirements of the poet are imagination and a musical ear; of the historian, accuracy and

capacity for laborious research; of the man of science, observation and powers of generalisation; and so forth. But it is not the special qualifications of the individual writer of which we are now in search, but of those more general characteristics which are indispensable to the author, *quâ* author, whatever be his branch of literary work.

"The reason why so few good books are written," says Walter Bagehot, "is that so few people that can write know anything." Here we have two valuable hints. The author who produces a good book is one who "knows something" and "can write"; that is, he has something to say which he knows to be true, and he is able to say it. Simple as this definition is, it is both accurate and comprehensive. An author is one to whom some portion of truth has revealed itself, and who is able to communicate that truth to others; he is, then, primarily a truth-teller.

Now this truth-telling is not the easy matter that it is popularly supposed to be. It is often difficult to ascertain the exact truth; it is often difficult to convey the exact truth to others; and the man who habitually sets himself to overcome these difficulties, does so because he understands the value of truth. In a word, the author is a truth-teller because he is a truth-lover.

Now that the love of truth is essential to the author who has to deal with fact—to the historian, for example, or to the writer who recounts his own experience—is intelligible enough; but that it is equally necessary to the novelist is less obvious. We are accustomed to think of fiction as opposed to truth, and to take it for granted that the one excludes the

6 ART AND CRAFT OF THE AUTHOR

other. But a very simple illustration will make it clear that the writer of fiction is no less concerned with truth than the writer of fact, though in a different way. Let us define the novel as "a picture of life"; we shall see at once that a picture may be either true or false; that it may give a true representation of its subject, or it may misrepresent and caricature. The painter, even for his most imaginative pictures, will study every detail from nature. So, if he is wise, will the novelist. There is one inviolable rule for both, namely, never to draw from fancy when it is possible to draw from fact. As the picture should be true to nature and to fact, so the novel should be true to life and to experience.

Take another illustration. Let us suppose that it is necessary to the plot of a novel that the hero should be struck with blindness in the prime of early manhood. The author will not, if he is wise, draw the subsequent career of his hero from fancy alone. The powers of the blind are a source of never-ending astonishment to all who have the opportunity of observing them; but those powers have very definite limits, and the author who would not fill his pages with incongruities and absurdities, will make it his business to acquaint himself with those limits. "My stories are not the truth," says Robert Louis Stevenson, "but I try to make my characters act as they would act in life. *No detail is too small to study for truth.*" The American novelist, Frank Norris (who appears in literature like some new primeval force, and whose untimely death is no ordinary loss to the literary world,) expresses his opinion on this point in no measured terms. Speaking of the power wielded by the novelist, he says: "Is

it not, in Heaven's name, essential that the People hear, not a lie, but the Truth ? . . . If the influence of the novel were not greater than that of all the pulpits, of all the newspapers between the oceans, it would not be so important that its message should be true. But the novelist to-day is the one who reaches the greatest audience. Right or wrong, the People turn to him the moment he speaks, and what he says, they believe. For the Million, Life is a contracted affair ; . . . they look . . . to the writer of fiction to give them an idea of life beyond their limits, and they believe him as they never have believed before, and never will again. . . . The People have a right to the Truth, as they have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is *not* right that they be exploited and deceived with false views of life."

Second only to the author's love of truth will be his love of work. This is important ; for upon his delight in his work the excellence of that work will, in a great measure, depend. The literary career is chosen for one of two reasons—either for love of the occupation which it provides, or for the sake of the profit which that occupation may bring. In a word, the work is done either for love or for money.

Now that the work which is done for love (or, to speak more accurately, from love) is of a far higher quality than that which is done for money, is recognised all the world over. We recognise it when we say of the services rendered by a doctor or a nurse, that they are such as no money can ever repay. The artist recognises it when he describes the work which he sells to supply his daily needs as a "pot-boiler," in contradistinction to the real work into which he puts

8 ART AND CRAFT OF THE AUTHOR

his heart. And that there should be this difference in quality is natural enough ; for there is nothing in the need of money which necessarily enables a man to do good work ; whereas there is a direct relation between the love of work and its excellence. And this for several reasons.

First, the love of his work supplies the author with a single definite object at which to aim, and thus ensures the concentration of his energies. The object on which his heart is set is the excellence, or it may be the perfection, of his work ; and he will joyfully make any sacrifice and undertake any drudgery which may conduce to this end. The road to excellence lies through difficulties ; and the patience, the courage, the energy before which difficulties disappear, all have their root in this love of work.

Of this the life of Robert Louis Stevenson furnishes a striking example. Never was work more passionately loved, and, surely, never was it done under greater difficulties. The amount that he contrived to accomplish, disabled as he continually was by attacks of dangerous illness, may well excite our astonishment. For years he suffered from writer's cramp, his right hand, as he pathetically expressed it, being "a thing of the past" ; and this obliged him to have recourse to dictation. But even this resource was frequently denied him. When threatened with hæmorrhage, he was strictly forbidden to utter a word. Yet, nothing daunted, he then dictated through the medium of the deaf and dumb alphabet. Now, nothing but a genuine delight in his work could have enabled a man to triumph over difficulties such as these.

Again : love is a great enlightener. What we love,

we understand ; and, on the other hand, what we care little about we usually know little about. Thus, the work of the same author will vary in proportion to his interest in his subject and consequent comprehension of it.

We find an illustration of this inequality in the works of Sir Walter Scott. He was specially interested in historical, antiquarian, romantic and legendary lore ; and everything in his works connected with these subjects is admirable. Again : he loved the Scottish peasantry ; and nothing can be better than his pictures of peasant life and character. Such love as that of Jeanie Deans for her sister appealed to him strongly, and is accordingly drawn with a powerful and unerring hand. But he had little or no sympathy with the ordinary love affairs of young men and maidens of the upper class, and his delineations of these have scarcely even the semblance of reality.

We have said enough to show that literature is not the offspring of the intellect alone, but of the intellect reinforced by the affections, with their attendant train of sympathies, perceptions and experience. In some authors, as, for example, in George Meredith, the intellect predominates ; in others, as in Charles Kingsley, the heart. But in the production of all that is worthy the name of literature, both intellect and heart are engaged.

The foregoing remarks are not intended to discourage ; but simply to indicate to the intending author, the conditions under which alone good work can be done. If the literary career be indeed his vocation, neither possible sacrifices, probable diffi-

10 ART AND CRAFT OF THE AUTHOR

culties, nor inevitable drudgery will deter him from embracing it with ardour. Nor will he ever regret his choice ; for “ he has a work, a life-purpose ; he has found it, and will follow it.”¹

¹ It may be well to state here, that I did not become acquainted with Schopenhauer's “ Art of Literature ” until the first seven chapters of the present volume had been written.—C. E. H.

CHAPTER III

WORK

The literary life a life of labour—Talent no substitute for work—Example, Sir Walter Scott—How to begin—Variations in the author's powers—Causes—Remedies—Re-writing—J. R. Green—Plato.

"You must necessarily spoil a good deal of paper ; therefore, I beg of you, spoil it cheerfully."—W. HUNT.

"If he can't spend an afternoon turning a single phrase, he'd better give up the profession of literature."—R. L. STEVENSON.

THE literary career is, for many reasons, a singularly attractive one. But it is not our present purpose to enumerate its advantages, since these are already well known to all for whom these pages are intended ; rather, we shall dwell upon the reverse side of the picture. For the literary life, with all its joys, is no bed of roses : it involves much labour and many disappointments ; it has no sinecures in its gift, and offers nothing to the idler. Hard work—honest, earnest, and prolonged—is the law of its being. He who can work, and he alone, may compete for its rewards with some hope of success.

This point we would especially urge upon those whose talents are above the average. For although these, if they are willing to work, may easily distance

their less gifted competitors, yet the chances are that they will lag behind them in the race, because they will imagine that, for them, work is unnecessary. To remove this impression (and removed it must be, if they would not cut themselves off from all possibility of success) let them study the lives of those who have given us our literature, when they will find that never have there been more indefatigable workers.

Let us take Sir Walter Scott as an example. The mass of excellent work which he has left behind him is sufficient evidence of his extraordinary capacity for labour. When we look at his collected works—his poetry, novels, histories and biographies,—it seems almost incredible that a single mind should have produced them all. Those who have experience in literary work will understand what labour is represented by the fact that the same year saw the production of "Guy Mannering," "The Antiquary," "Old Mortality," "The Black Dwarf," and "Harold the Dauntless," besides various miscellaneous papers. "Guy Mannering" was actually written in six weeks.

Yet Scott was no recluse, wholly devoted to literary work. During the years that his pen was most busy he superintended the management of his own property, exercised a liberal hospitality, made himself personally responsible for the entertainment of his guests, spent several days in the week in the Court of Session, and was, at the same time, Sheriff of Selkirk.

In the chapters which follow, we propose to deal in detail with the successive stages of the author's work; but a few general remarks on the subject may be offered here. And first, how is the young writer to set to work? The advice given by Dr. Johnson, that

he should not "wait for the afflatus," but should "sit down doggedly," is undoubtedly excellent; but this is not the first stage in his work. In one of Mrs. Gaskell's books, there is an amusing account of a would-be authoress, who makes elaborate preparations for the career on which she intends to enter. Securing for herself a large supply of pens, ink and paper, a study, and solitude, she sits down to write; and only at this point discovers that she has nothing to say.

The writer who would avoid a similar disappointment will be careful to have a clear idea of what he intends to say before he sits down to write. But having reached this point, he may "sit down doggedly," and set himself to express in writing the thoughts that are in his mind. This quiet, determined effort at expression is the best method of invoking "the afflatus"; for "To the persevering mortal, the blessed Immortals are swift."

It will simplify his task if he begins by taking a bird's-eye view of his subject, and noting the divisions into which it naturally falls: he will then be able to proceed step by step, concentrating his powers upon one division at a time.

He will very early make the discovery that his powers vary from day to day, and even from hour to hour. At one time, his thoughts will come to him clothed in language so appropriate that he hastens to commit them to writing lest they should escape him; at another, every sentence is a labour. But that labour he must make up his mind to bestow. However incapable he may feel—however certain he may be that what he is writing will be fit for nothing but the waste-paper basket—he must not desist from his

14 ART AND CRAFT OF THE AUTHOR

efforts. If, at the end of a morning's work the waste-paper basket is full—if he has literally nothing to show for the labour of several hours—he may nevertheless rest assured that he is one stage nearer the end of his work. For the writing of what will *not* do is often an indispensable preliminary to the writing of what *will* do.

He will probably find that his powers are at their best at certain hours in the day, and these he will carefully reserve for his work. The first waking hours are usually fruitful, especially if the subject has been much in the mind the evening before.

But it will sometimes happen that the usually fruitful hours prove barren, that ideas refuse to take shape, and that for days no progress is made. The difficulty here arises from one of two causes : either the writer is not completely master of his subject, or the thought to be expressed is one which it is unusually difficult to clothe in words. In the first case there is no remedy but to reconsider the whole subject, and try to sift the matter to the bottom. To lay aside the work, and turn the attention to other matters, would be to lose the vantage-ground already gained. On the other hand, if the difficulty be one of expression merely, the writer cannot do better than turn his thoughts resolutely from the obstinate sentences, and occupy himself with some entirely different subject. Probably, in a day or two, the idea will take shape. For, after all, it is natural for thoughts to clothe themselves in words ; and they will often do this better if left to themselves than if anything like coercion is attempted.

Perhaps there is no work which the writer is so

reluctant to undertake as the alteration or re-writing of a manuscript which has been laid aside as finished. He has, we will suppose, just completed an important chapter of his book. It has been long in hand, and has cost him much research and more thought ; it is a relief to put it aside and turn to something else. A day or two later, fresh material comes into his hands, of such importance that it cannot be neglected. He would give much to have had it a month earlier ; but it is not really too late, and the chapter is re-written. The new material is incorporated with the old ; and the author once more lays aside the manuscript, not without a strong sense of satisfaction in its increased value. That evening he meets a friend whose tastes are akin to his own, and the subject of the manuscript is discussed between them. As the conversation proceeds, the subject presents itself to his mind in a wholly new light ; he sees that the matter might be very differently handled, and would gain materially from the change. But the necessary alteration would involve the re-casting of the whole chapter. Can he make up his mind to do this ? Rather, can he make up his mind to leave it undone ? Has he ever allowed himself to say of anything, " It will do " ? Has he not always insisted that it will *not* do, if it is possible to do it better ? And thus the labour of re-writing is once more undertaken.

Now at last the manuscript is finished ; and he carries it, as his custom is, to an acute and critical friend, for a final opinion. To his dismay, he is told that, although his meaning may be clear enough to the initiated, there is little hope that it would be intelligible to one who has had no previous acquaintance with the

subject. There is no help for it ; and the chapter is written once more ; this time with special reference to the capacity of the general reader.

This is no fancy picture. The first chapter of J. R. Green's history of "The Making of England" was written no fewer than ten times ; and might not even then have been sent to press, but for the timely intervention of his friends.

It is said of Plato that he wrote the introduction to his "Republic" seven times.

These incidents are suggestive, as showing the spirit in which the true author goes about his work. "All who have meant good work with their whole hearts," says Stevenson, "have done good work" ; and although this may be the sanguine expression of the enthusiast, it is at least certain that the converse is true, and that all who have done good work have meant good work with their whole hearts.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

1. *Reading for the sake of education—Quality rather than quantity—Effect of books upon the character—Ruskin on reading—The choice of the best—Ignorance of what is best—Power of discriminating between good and bad indispensable to the author—*2. *Writing learned by writing—Experience of R. L. Stevenson—Importance of criticism—Useful exercises: translation and writing upon matters of fact—Perfection rather than glory.*

“Nay, falter not; ’tis an assured good
To seek the noblest; ’tis your only good
Now you have seen it; for that higher vision
Poisons all meaner choice for evermore.”

FELIX HOLT.

IN describing the labour which is inseparable from the literary life, we have necessarily anticipated much that properly belongs to the later stages of the author's work; but we must now retrace our steps. For there is much preliminary work to be undertaken before the threshold of that life can be crossed; and the task to which the intending author must first apply himself, will be his own education and training for the career which he has chosen. For his training, he must write; for his education, he must read. It is true that only a part of his education will come to him

from books ; but it is with that part that we are immediately concerned.

At this point in his career, if he be so happy as to possess a friend who has trodden this path before him, who is willing to act as his torch-bearer, who will guide his reading, draw out his thoughts, show him his mistakes, and point out the dangers which beset the way, he may safely leave his education in these competent hands. But it is more than probable that he has no such friend, and, in that case, he is practically left to his own resources.

And here let him pause for a moment, and consider what it is that he wishes to do. Does he wish to teach others ?—for every writer is in some sort a teacher—then must he first teach himself. And what is it that he requires to learn ? Surely everything that he will have occasion to teach ; and since it is impossible, at the outset, to foresee what this will be, the range of his reading can hardly be too wide.

It is not, however, the range of our reading nor its amount that concerns us most nearly, but the quality of the books we choose. Let us lay down for ourselves an inviolable rule that we will read none but the best books ; and this, not merely because life is short and our time for reading is limited, not merely because the time spent upon a bad book is taken from a good one, but on account of the effect upon the mind and character which books are capable of producing. For we go to them not only to possess ourselves of the information which they contain, nor for the cultivation of a good style in writing ; (although, for both these uses, we value them highly), but for mental and moral

nourishment; and upon the quality of that nourishment our mental and moral health will, in a great measure, depend. A good book enlarges the outlook, deepens the sympathies, quickens the perceptions, enriches the mind, and elevates the character. This is real education; for it is the "leading forth" or developing of the powers of the soul. Our chosen books, like our chosen friends, readily raise or sink us to their own level; "it is so easy with the great to be great," and as easy, alas! with the base to be base.

Ruskin, in his "Sesame and Lilies," has a characteristic passage, in which he personifies books, and makes them address us thus:—

"Do you ask to be the companion of nobles? Make yourself noble, and you shall be. Do you long for the conversation of the wise? Learn to understand it, and you shall hear it. But on other terms, No. If you will not rise to us, we cannot stoop to you. . . . You must rise to the level of our thoughts, if you would be gladdened by them. This, then," he adds, "is what you have to do, and I admit that it is much. You must, in a word, love these people, if you are to be among them. . . . You must love them, and show your love by a true desire to be taught by them and to enter into their thoughts. To enter into theirs, observe; not to find your own expressed by them. If the person who wrote the book is not wiser than you, you need not read it; if he be, he will think differently from you in many respects."

It is strange that it should be necessary, in this matter of reading, to insist so strongly upon a prin-

ciple which is the natural rule of our daily lives. In ordinary matters we do not need to be told to choose the best, still less to make resolutions and lay down rules for ourselves : we naturally choose it because we want it ; because we are anxious, as the phrase goes, to do the best we can for ourselves. But there is a further reason. In the affairs and transactions of every-day life we *know* what is best ; we can distinguish for ourselves what is good from what is bad ; whereas, in this matter of books, this is precisely what many of us cannot do. It is not because we are willing to be put off with an inferior article that we read a worthless, or worse than worthless, book, but because we do not know that it is inferior. Probably four-fifths of the reading public, in the absence of any tradition or received opinion, would come to some such conclusion as Robert Louis Stevenson's "honest man," who "thought, and was not ashamed to have it known of him, that Ouida was better in every way than William Shakespeare." "This," adds Stevenson, "would be about the staple of lay criticism."

Now, this power of discriminating between good and bad in literature, the immediate recognition of what is valuable, and recoil from what is worthless, is indispensable to the author. This knowledge is an essential part of his art, which he must make it his business to acquire. For how is it possible that he should himself produce what is good, if he is incapable of recognising excellence when it comes in his way ? Happily for himself, he is not left to wander alone through the pathless wilderness of existing books. He has the guidance of received

opinion—that is, of the expression of the cultivated taste of each generation in turn; and of this he should thankfully avail himself, until, by this very process, his own taste becomes cultivated. Let him, then, at least during the period of his education, restrict his reading to such books as that taste has approved. He will soon find that the “higher vision” has poisoned “all meaner choice for evermore.”

Our next point will be the writer's training. “*A force de forger, on devient forgeron*”; and the proverb is as applicable to the artist as to the craftsman. We can learn to write by writing, and in no other way. And if we ask how we are to set about this writing which is to teach us to write, the answer is supplied by no less a person than that master of the art, Robert Louis Stevenson. In a very interesting essay, entitled “A College Magazine,” he gives us a detailed account of the process by which he taught himself to write, of the “literary scales” which he practised with that end in view.

“As I walked,” he tells us, “my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words. . . . Description was the principal field of my exercise; for to any one with senses there is always something worth describing, and town and country are but one continuous subject.”

So far, however, he “lived with words only,” but he goes on to describe a further exercise, which called for more intellectual effort. This was nothing else than a deliberate attempt to imitate the style of any author who happened, at the moment, to dominate his fancy. Like most artists, he was very susceptible to the influence of style; he readily caught

22 ART AND CRAFT OF THE AUTHOR

the infection, and, when imbued with the manner of a favourite poet or essayist, it was easy to him to reproduce it. This, as we see, did not prevent his acquiring a very distinctive and original style of his own; but it was "in the works of these masters that he learned the language which he was to use after his own fashion." This kind of imitation he considers the most valuable practice which an intending author can have. "That," he says, "like it or not, is the way to learn to write; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. It was so Keats learned, and there was never a finer temperament for literature than Keats's. It was so, if we could trace it out, that all men have learned." We have no space for further quotation, but we commend the whole paper to the study of our readers; it is full of valuable suggestion.

And yet there was a weak point in Stevenson's system, as he himself came to recognise, namely, that his attempts were submitted to no censor. His fine taste and his very extensive acquaintance with English classics would go far to minimise, in his case, the effect of this disadvantage. But, by the ordinary mortal, criticism is needed; and the Essay Club, wherè the work passes through the hands of a competent critic, may be of great service to the young writer. For it is not only that we work better when we know that the result of our work will be weighed in the balance, but that criticism shows us our weak points, and thus gives us the opportunity of strengthening them. Left to ourselves, we are apt to practise what we do best and most easily; whereas we ought to concentrate our forces upon what we

do worst and find most difficult. It is comparatively easy to record the results of our own observation or to express our own thoughts, especially as in youth these are likely to be neither subtle nor profound. The thought that has taken root in our own mind, and has germinated and developed there, will often clothe itself in words without conscious effort on our part. But it is far otherwise when we set ourselves to express the thoughts of others, especially if those thoughts be far higher and deeper than our own. To train himself in this really difficult branch of his art, the writer cannot have a finer exercise than translation. The words of the original will not help him much; it will be necessary for him to take into account the genius of the language from which the translation is made, as well as to enter into the thoughts of the writer, if he is to give those thoughts adequate expression. This is no easy task; but in proportion to its difficulty will be the benefit derived from it and the joy of success.

Another very useful exercise is the following: let the young writer read carefully some matter of fact—either history, science, biography, or what not; let him make himself thoroughly master of the subject; then, shaking himself free of the actual materials, let him tell the story in his own way, as clearly, simply, and concisely as possible. He will find it a bracing exercise to work in the light fetters imposed by fact, and, at the same time, he will gain experience in the handling of materials, often a matter of difficulty even to the mature author.

Finally, if he is wise, he will follow the example of Josef Joubert, of whom, even in youth, it was said,

"Il s'inquiétait de perfection bien plus que de gloire."

Even if his productions are never to see the light, he should make it a rule to finish as carefully, and in all respects to work as well, as though he were writing for mankind and for all time. And his reward will be nothing less than this : that he will "sit down at last, legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice ; and he himself, knowing what he wants to do, and (within the narrow limit of a man's ability) able to do it."

CHAPTER V

THINKING, AND STIMULUS TO THOUGHT

Difficulty of thinking—Thinking defined as truth-seeking—Experience of the truth-seeker—Thinking a natural, and therefore a slow process—Described by Joubert—Need of mental stimulus—Conversation—Its rarity—A stimulating and transforming influence—Socrates—C. Lamb—Books—Their highest use to inspire—Genius—Originality—Force—Emerson's Essays.

"What is the hardest thing in the world? To think."—
EMERSON.

"I have only to read books to think."—R. L. STEVENSON.

WE come now to the most difficult part of our subject. To most authors the act of thinking is unquestionably the hardest part of their work, although there are some few who find it still harder to express their thoughts; and Stevenson gives it as his opinion that "sitting at the table is about the worst of it." But, as this author had a following of attendant Brownies, who did his thinking for him while he slept, so that he awoke to find it ready to his hand, his judgment as to the relative difficulty of thinking and sitting at the table can hardly be accepted as final.

And if the act of thinking be difficult, it is no less

difficult to formulate any description or explanation of it. Nevertheless, since we are not here dealing with mere abstractions, but with a definite mental process, which we can watch in ourselves and understand in others, it should, surely, not be impossible to give some intelligible account of it.

What, then, is thinking? In common parlance, the word seems to cover the whole field of mental activity, from the most abstruse speculation to the idlest fancy. We are not, however, concerned here with the popular use of the term, but with the author's use of it: with that "thinking" which has given us our literature, which has produced our systems of philosophy, our science, our histories, our best novels, and even much of our poetry. It is a mental effort; but of what nature? and towards what object is it directed?

Without attempting any diagnosis of the actual mental process, we may describe the author's thinking as, first, the effort to see truth; and, secondly, the effort to make what he sees visible to others. The object, then, of all true thinking is discovery rather than invention; and this is a distinction which the young writer should keep steadily in view. The function of the author is twofold: he is first a seer, and secondly, a reporter of truth; and it is only when he abandons this high position that he severs himself from the producers of literature and sinks to the level of the mere book-maker.

Let us now return to the young writer, in whose education and training we have been taking so keen an interest, and note how far this principle is capable of practical application. He has, we will suppose,

chosen his subject, and is preparing for the task that lies before him. He is thinking; and we can make a shrewd guess at the tenor of his thoughts. Without a doubt he is considering what he is going to say, and how he is going to say it. He is a truth-seeker, and therefore the question which confronts him is not "What do I think about this matter?" not, "What have others thought or said?" but "What is the truth?" This is an inquiry that may lead him far afield; he may find himself compelled to part with many a favourite theory and cherished belief; but he will pay the price willingly, for he recognises that the gain is greater than the loss, and that he is but relinquishing the shadow that he may grasp the substance. Like Emerson's scholar, "he worships truth, and foregoes all things for that."

Now this kind of thinking is not only a difficult, but often a very tedious process. For it is, after all, a natural process; and every natural process demands time for its accomplishment. Moreover, it cannot be interfered with. If we pull open the petals of a rose, we do not obtain the same result as if we leave them to unfold naturally in the sunshine. So with the thought. It must be allowed time to develop if it is to come to perfection. But of all this the young writer knows nothing. He is prepared for difficulties, but not for inaction. He tries to goad his powers into activity, and failing in this, a strong sense of incapacity lays hold upon him. Gaze as he will, he can see nothing clearly; for days he has been turning his subject over in his mind, and is apparently no nearer discovering the truth about it than he was at the beginning. He believes that he has "come to a place

called 'Stop,'” and a chill fear that he will never do anything clutches at his heart. Yet, in truth, he has come to no such place, and has no real cause for discouragement. He is but working underground, and will soon emerge into air and sunshine. He is on the right track ; a little patience, a little perseverance, and the goal will be reached. And when at length the light breaks in upon his mind, and the truth unfolds itself gradually before his eyes or stands revealed in a single flash, he may be as certain as if he had watched the process, that this revelation is the direct result of all the labour and effort which at the time appeared to him so fruitless.

Josef Joubert, a writer of singular delicacy and subtlety, describes “certain spirits, lovers of light, who, when they have an idea to put forth, brood long over it first, and wait patiently till it shines” ; and a more beautiful description of the process and result of thought it would be hard to find.

Another saying of his, hardly less admirable, is the following : “If a truth is nude and crude, that is a proof it has not been steeped long enough in the soul.” It might with equal justice be said, If a truth is not clear that is a proof it has not been steeped long enough in the soul. Much of the obscurity of modern writing arises from this source. The author has not waited to mature his proposition, but has “e'en brought it to market in the green ear.” But this part of our subject will be dealt with more fully in a later chapter.

Hitherto we have been occupied with the experience of the solitary thinker, an experience which is, we believe, all but universal and, from the nature of the

case, inevitable. For solitude is a necessary condition of profound thought, and in the development of thought, as of everything else, time is an important factor. But another factor, no less important, has now to be considered. If there is much that the writer can only do for himself there is also much that can only be done for him by others.

Now, it is not only in the initial stages of his work that the author is haunted by a sense of incapacity ; at every succeeding stage he is liable to find that he cannot do what nevertheless he knows that he can do. This may sound paradoxical, but it is a paradox that every writer will understand. What he is attempting would not be beyond his powers if he had the full command of those powers : it is not harder than what he did with ease yesterday and will probably do as easily to-morrow ; but, try as he will, he cannot do it to-day ; the mind "can no more empty itself by its own action than can a deal box."

Now, what he needs at this point is the mental stimulus which comes from contact with other minds, and this he may derive either from conversation or from books. It is true that conversation—the keenest of intellectual pleasures, the most stimulating of intellectual exercises—is hardly ever to be had. And yet, now and then in the course of our lives, we are so happy as to meet with "a companion who is truly such," and the result is startling. Some transforming influence is at work upon us, so that we no longer recognise ourselves. What was before a wilderness is now a garden. The mind teems with new ideas : we become conscious of hitherto unsuspected powers. The change is definite enough to be remarked by

others, although its full extent is known only to ourselves. "Our chief want in life," says Emerson, "is some one who shall make us do what we can. This is the service of a friend." With the advent of such a friend "the face of all the world is changed," and we are "lifted into that mood out of which thoughts come that remain as stars in our firmament" for ever. Whence come they? We cannot tell. Up to this moment we have had no such thoughts; but for this companionship we had not had them now.

The existence of this rare gift—the power of calling into action in the mind of another that which would otherwise have remained dormant—was recognised as long ago as the days of Plato. It is to this that Socrates refers when he calls himself "the midwife of men's thoughts." De Quincey and Emerson insist strongly on this result of sympathetic intercourse; and it was probably something of this kind that Charles Lamb had in his mind when, after speaking of the death of several friends, he said, "And now, for so many parts of myself, I have lost the market."

Intercourse such as this sends our author back to his work a new man. What was before impossible is now child's play. The attempts which cost him so much but a few hours since are viewed with surprise not unmixed with mortification; casting them aside, he re-writes the whole with scarcely a moment's hesitation and with the joy that only successful work can give. Such companionship, however, is rare. It is probable that it comes but seldom to any of us, while to many it never comes at all; and these last are fain to fall back for their mental stimulus upon books, which are more or less accessible to all. "Books,"

says Emerson, "are the best of things, well used : abused, among the worst. What is the right use ? They are for nothing but to inspire. . . . The one thing in the world of value is the active soul."

So much has been already said upon the influence of books that we shall only inquire here what are the qualities in an author which give to his books the power of inspiring others. Joubert, himself a genius, holds that the highest stimulus is derived from contact with genius. But, short of this, we believe that originality and force are the qualities which give the strongest impetus to the mind of the reader ;—originality, which lifts him above convention, and compels him for the time to see things as they are ; and force, which generates heat and activity in the soul.

The influence exercised by one mind over another fills a large space in Emerson's writings, and the reader will do well to acquaint himself with the essays on "Society and Solitude," "Spiritual Laws," "Clubs," and "The Christian Teacher."

CHAPTER VI

THE CHOICE OF A SUBJECT

Two types of author : those who seek their subjects and those whose subjects seek them—Competing subjects—One subject—Search for a popular subject—Laws of supply and demand inapplicable—Real question, What can the author write?—What he knows and what interests him—On writing without knowledge—On taking advice—Mrs. Gaskell, Dr. John Brown, R. L. Stevenson—Ruskin on the author's true subject.

"If your subject do not appear to you the flower of the world at this moment, you have not rightly chosen it."—EMERSON.

"'Foole,' sayde my muse to me, 'looke in thine heart and write.'"—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

IN the short life of Mrs. Ewing, which appeared in *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, a few months after her death, we find the following passage : "Julie has often said how strange it seemed to her, when people who had a ready pen for writing consulted her as to what they should 'write about.' She suffered so much from over-abundance of ideas which she had not the physical strength to put on paper."

Two very different types are represented here ; the first, the writer who goes to seek his subject, the second, the writer whose subjects come to seek him. In the mind of the first, the wish to write prompts the

search for a subject; in that of the second, the presence of the subject prompts the wish to write. The first has a ready pen; and as it is always pleasant to do what we can do easily, he casts about him for a subject on which to exercise it. But he does not readily find one; on the contrary, this matter of choice is to him so serious a difficulty, that he would thankfully have his subjects chosen for him.

Very different is the case of the writer to whom subjects offer themselves. To him, nature, art, literature, every new sight and sound, even the chance word or encounter, are full of suggestion. His mind teems with subjects, insistent, exacting; and his only difficulty is to decide in what order he will take them, and which shall be the first to receive the attention for which all alike are clamouring. At last one is selected; and forthwith it takes up its abode with him and becomes his inseparable companion. It accompanies him in his walks, sits with him at table, haunts his pillow, and claims his first waking moments. He must needs put it upon paper, if only to be rid of it; and no sooner is one subject thus disposed of, than another steps forward to take its place.

A variation of this type is found in the author whose mind is possessed by a single subject, to the investigation and elucidation of which he consecrates his life. The one subject is no less engrossing and imperious than the many; but it is less distracting. This man will write but one book, but that one will be monumental.

Now, to writers such as these, it would be as impertinent as it is unnecessary to offer either advice or suggestion: for the one will always find it possible to

choose among competing subjects, while the subject of the other is fixed as irrevocably as his destiny, and is, in fact, his destiny. It should therefore be clearly understood that the remarks which follow are addressed exclusively to the writer who finds it necessary to seek a subject, and who has no definite principle to guide him in his search.

Speaking generally, his position is something like this: he wishes to find a subject for an article, poem, tale or what not, which shall be readily accepted by the editor of a magazine, and be deservedly popular with its readers. He knows nothing of either editor or readers; but on these points much may surely be gathered from the pages of the magazine itself. Accordingly, a desultory search, through many monthly numbers, ensues; from which he emerges with the dispiriting conviction that the tastes of both editor and readers differ widely from his own, and that in attempting to find a subject that will suit them, he is setting himself a very difficult task.

So difficult, indeed, that he had better, at once, abandon it as impossible. He is assuming that literature is regulated by the economic laws of supply and demand;—that what the reader wants, or thinks he wants, the author is bound to provide; and on this principle no good literary work was ever done yet. "This doing things to suit people! they'll hate you, and you won't suit them," says William Hunt, in words as true as they are forcible.

But let the writer now withdraw his thoughts from his readers, and turn them upon himself. For the question of primary importance here, is not, What do others wish to read? but, What is he able to write?

and he will better serve the cause of his readers by considering what actually interests himself than what may possibly interest them.

Emerson tells us that "that statement only is fit to be made public which we have come at in attempting to satisfy our own curiosity"; and, guided by this clue, the writer will do well to review his intellectual resources. He has had his share of experience, and this, though perhaps not wide, has probably been vivid. He has tastes, he has pursuits; there are subjects which he has studied for their own sake, and lines of thought which he has followed to interesting conclusions. All this is so much material ready to his hand, and from this store he should choose the subject most interesting to himself. This is important, because upon his own interest in the subject his power of interesting his readers will largely depend. On this point Nature is inexorable. Neither talent nor skill, neither labour nor artifice, will avail to make that subject interesting to others in which the writer's own interest is wanting. He, on his part, may have grave doubts as to the wisdom of thus thrusting upon others his favourite subjects. He may have good reason to know that they are not generally popular; for he has pursued them in solitude, with little or no sympathy from his daily companions. Yet he need not, on this account, despair of making their interest apparent to his readers; for in writing, he appeals to the wider world outside his own. He may be lonely in his own circle, but he is not alone in the world. What he cares for, others care for; what is of value to him is of value to them. To quote William Hunt once more, "Find out what you can do, and do it;

follow your own individual taste, and somebody will appreciate it."

Again : let no subject be rejected merely because it is old and time-worn. To give a fresh view of an old subject demands far more originality than to treat a wholly new one. All subjects of purely human interest must needs be old ; yet it is just these that are for ever new. They renew their youth in each generation ; they take on new forms, and appear under new aspects, and therefore call for fresh representation in Art. The subject of Love is as old as the human race itself ; yet, in every age, the true poet finds something to say about it that is at once new and true.

The writer who wishes to secure a ready acceptance for his productions, will do well to write upon facts, rather than upon his own fancies or theories. For an unknown author will often find it difficult to gain a hearing for his opinions, where facts would speak for themselves.

It ought to be unnecessary to caution the young author against writing upon subjects of which he knows nothing ; but the practice is so general, that the warning, ludicrous as it appears, is not in reality uncalled for. In an earlier chapter, we had occasion to allude to the necessity of distinguishing between the true and the false in literature. The difference is easily defined. The author of the genuine book deals with realities, and writes from knowledge. His first concern is, not to write, but to know. He is, as Carlyle expresses it, "under the noble necessity of being true" ; and, until he knows the truth about his subject, until it stretches before him like a landscape seen from a hill, he will not put pen to paper. "When one sees

the thing as it is," says Carlyle, "feels that one has got it under his eye, then one can speak of it, on due impulse." No book, written on this principle, can be altogether valueless.

The author of the spurious book, on the other hand, deals with counterfeits, and writes from his own fancy or invention. Many modern novels belong to this class. The author descants fluently upon life, love, human nature, divinity, law, medicine, and what not, apparently without a suspicion that any preliminary knowledge of these subjects is necessary. Thus his work is nothing but a series of guesses; and guesses are among the things which are of no value to any but the owner. "I have guesses enough of my own," says Goëthe; "if a man write a book, let him set down only what he knows."

We have seen that the writer who has a difficulty in deciding upon a subject is apt to consult his friends as to what he shall "write about." Nor is this proceeding to be condemned, or even deprecated, provided only that his friends have had experience of literary work, and are well acquainted with his special powers and tastes.

Instances are not wanting, in the history of English literature, in which not the choice of a subject merely, but the adoption of the literary career, has resulted from the suggestions of a competent adviser. But for the advice of William and Mary Howitt, Mrs. Gaskell might never have produced "Mary Barton" or the many admirable novels which followed in its train. But for the discrimination of Hugh Miller, we might never have heard of "Marjorie Fleming" or "Rab and his Friends."

Dr. John Brown has himself described the thrill of mingled hope and fear with which he read the letter which, by inviting him to contribute to the *Witness* newspaper, changed the colour of his life. He goes on to tell how fear, for a while, predominated; how he declared that he could not write, had never written a line for the press, and must return the fee; how his wife quietly appropriated the money, and "heartened" him to write. "And write I did," he continues, "but with awful sufferings and difficulty, and much destruction of sleep. . . . Had this packet not come in, . . . there are many chances to one I might never have plagued any printer with my bad hand and my endless corrections."

These are instances in which suggestions were offered and followed with the happiest results; but others might be cited of a very different order. It was in response to the advice of a brother author that Stevenson projected a biography of the Duke of Wellington; and, to this day, we cannot but regret the waste of the valuable time, and yet more valuable strength, which were expended on preparations for a work foreign alike to his character and his genius.

This is only one example out of many which go to show that in this matter the author is, in the great majority of cases, his own best adviser.

In the following passage from "Sesame and Lilies" we have Ruskin's view of the principles which should determine the choice of a subject:—

"The author has something to say, which he perceives to be true and useful, or helpfully beautiful. So far as he knows, no one has yet said it; so far as

he knows, no one else can say it. He is bound to say it, clearly and melodiously if he may ; clearly, at all events. In the sum of his life, he finds this to be the thing, or group of things, manifest to him ;—this, the piece of true knowledge, or sight, which his share of sunshine and earth has permitted him to seize. He would fain set it down for ever ; engrave it on rock, if he could ; saying, ‘this is the best of me ; . . . this I saw and knew : this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory.’ That is his ‘writing ;’ it is, in his small human way, and with whatever degree of true inspiration is in him, his ‘inscription’ or ‘scripture.’ That is a BOOK.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE HANDLING OF MATERIALS

Collection and management of material—Materials drawn (1) from life, (2) from written sources—Difficulties presented by the latter—Advantages of previous knowledge—Reading, note-taking, classification of notes—Plan of the whole—Selection and rejection—Principle of unity—Illustrations from Old Masters and architecture—One central idea—All else subordinate—Contrast C. Dickens with Mr. R. Kipling—Historical biography—Treatment—Material must undergo a change—May be transformed, clothed, idealised, transmuted—R. L. Stevenson—C. Brontë—G. Eliot.

“‘What are you to do with your raw materials when they come into your ports?’

“Mr. Toots, to whom the question seemed perplexing, suggested, ‘Cook ’em.’”—C. DICKENS.

“WHAT are you to do with your raw materials?” The question which so perplexed poor Mr. Toots, and which has been a puzzle to many a wiser head than his, is the one to which we have now to address ourselves.

If the process of thinking be the most difficult part of the author’s work, the collection and management of materials is by far the most laborious. For this, he must muster his energies and summon his powers of endurance; he will need them all.

Now, it is obvious that the materials of the author may be drawn from every variety of source. Nature, life, and experience, his daily calling, his holidays, his tastes, his pursuits—any or all of these may furnish him with materials for his work. But it is not with materials drawn directly from life that he will find it difficult to deal. For these come to him by degrees; they steal imperceptibly into his mind; they fall naturally into order, and take shape without conscious effort on his part. It is the materials that come to him in the shape of written or printed matter that present the real difficulty. For these confront him in masses, which the mind finds it difficult to receive, and still more difficult to re-organise and present in a new form. It is with the management of materials of this class that we shall be chiefly occupied in the present chapter.

The subject falls naturally into three divisions: (1) Collection and Classification; (2) Selection and Rejection; (3) Treatment.

(1) Collection and Classification. In the collection of materials the advantage possessed by the writer who already has some knowledge of his subject becomes at once apparent. For not only can he begin his work by sketching his subject in outline, but he knows what to look for and where to look for it. As he reads, each item can have its place assigned to it, and thus collection and classification will go hand in hand.

Very different is the case of the author who finds himself obliged to write on a subject of which he knows nothing. He must begin his work by reading for his own information. He can make no plan; he cannot

even decide, as he reads, what is and what is not necessary to his purpose, since that purpose is, as yet, unformed. He can but surround himself with the best authorities on his subject, and work his way steadily through each in turn, making careful notes of all important points, with the volume and page where each is to be found. But the work is laborious, and it is more than probable that, before he reaches the end of his task, Despair will have him in its clutches. What he has to do would task his powers to the utmost if those powers were at their best, and behold, they are buried, suffocated, crushed, beneath the mass of material. He knows that if anything is to be done with it he must get the upper hand, he must master it; but, in the meantime, it masters him. At this point he is tempted to throw up the whole undertaking, and turn his back for ever on the literary career.

Before, however, he yields to this temptation, he turns once more to the notes, which have reached such formidable dimensions. He will at least try to reduce them to order; they may be of use to another, if not to himself. Dividing his subject into a few simple heads, he proceeds to sort and arrange; and forthwith the sense of mastery begins to reassert itself. He can see now that the story he has to tell lies hidden in these materials, as the statue is concealed in the block of marble. By degrees the innumerable details fall into place, and the subject begins to take shape as a whole. Now, at last, he can map out his work.

And this brings us to the second division of our subject, Selection and Rejection.

If we examine the cartoons by which the Old Masters prepared for their great paintings, we shall be especially

struck with the fulness and perfection of the detail. It is evident that every inch of the canvas was mapped out before the work was begun. But this is not all. This detail is not merely decorative—it is not inserted to fill up blank spaces, but to illustrate and carry out the central idea of the picture. So with the perfect specimen of architecture. Not only is every detail of the structure planned before a stone is laid, but each stone heightens, while it is subordinate to, the effect of the whole.¹ This is the great principle of Unity which should underlie every species of composition. It is impossible to over-estimate its importance, for it is to the work of art, what life is to the organism. Without it the book may contain an orderly series of statements; it can never be an organic whole.

Among popular authors, no one has failed so conspicuously, in this matter of artistic unity, as Charles Dickens. His novels are little more than collections of vivid scenes, loosely thrown together; many of them in no way essential to the plot. Whole paragraphs might be cut away, with little or no loss to the story.

Now compare with these, two short stories by Mr. Rudyard Kipling, "Without Benefit of Clergy," and "The Man Who Was." In these not a line, scarcely even a word, could be altered without damage to the whole. To take away a sentence would be to amputate a limb.

Now, keeping these examples in mind, the author will not only make a complete sketch of his subject before he begins to write, but he will decide upon the idea which is to dominate the whole, before beginning his sketch. This done, he will return to his materials,

¹ Of this, Salisbury Cathedral affords an admirable example.

selecting from them everything which serves to illustrate or bring out that idea, and resolutely rejecting everything else. It is the natural tendency of the inexperienced author to include in his composition everything interesting, attractive, or amusing upon which he can lay his hands ; but this temptation must be steadily resisted. To insert anything which is not necessary to the completeness of the whole, is false art ; or rather, it is not art at all.

Let us suppose that our author is about to write a biographical sketch of some historical personage. In a biography the personal element should overpower every other ; for it is, primarily, a study of character : it should present a portrait, as vivid, lifelike, and comprehensive as possible. In historical biography it may be necessary to touch on the circumstances of the times, the condition of the country, the state of parties at home, relations with foreign Powers, and the like ; but these must be kept strictly subordinate to the main theme. They are accessories merely, and, like the background of a picture, should be so used as to throw up the central figure. Even the career and life-work should be viewed in their relation to the character. With this central idea in his mind, the author will cull from his materials everything that bears upon or brings out the character of his hero, and ruthlessly discard everything else. He will keep to the high-road, and not allow himself to wander into by-ways, however alluring ; and this singleness of purpose will give unity to his work. For example, in his chapter on the friendships of his hero, he will not think it necessary to give a biographical sketch of each friend in turn ; still less will he introduce anec-

dotes of their interviews with distinguished men, or quote the smart sayings of their acquaintances.

Judged by this standard, many modern biographies are little more than collections of material, from which the true biography has yet to be made. No definite object has been kept in view; and, without such an object, Selection and Rejection can have no meaning. The reader is left to piece out the character as best he can, and to paint the portrait for himself.

But, in truth, the production of a long biography, for which ample materials exist, is a task before which the stoutest may well quail. And when we consider that this singularly difficult work is usually entrusted, not to the practised author, but to one whose sole qualification for the task lies in the fact that he was intimate with the person whose life is to be written, we wonder less that so few biographies are entirely successful than that so many are readable. For an almost perfect example of the short biography, (and why should not all be short?) the reader is referred to Professor Bryce's "Studies in Contemporary Biography," where he will find some of the most masterly character-studies in the English language.¹

We come now to the last division of our subject, the Treatment of Material. The author has finally selected what he intends to use. How is he to use it? It is perhaps easier to say how he is not to use it; he must not attempt to give it to the world in the form in which he has received it. Something he must do to it; something he must make of it; some change it

¹ For some interesting remarks on the methods of the biographer, see Walter Bagehot's "Literary Studies," vol. i. p. 173.

must undergo at his hands. For material is, after all, but a means to an end ; and its real value depends, not on what it already is, but on what, in competent hands, it may become. At the point which our author has reached, his material is like the wheat which has been reaped, thrashed, and winnowed, but which has yet to undergo the process which shall transform it into food for man. The nature of this process will be determined as much by the character of the material and the use which is to be made of it, as by the special powers of the individual author. He may give it little more than a change of dress ; he may transform it, or embody it in a new form ; or it may be transmuted in his mind, and take on a wholly new nature. But the change, whatever it may be, must take place in the mind of the author ; it cannot be effected by any process, however ingenious, of fitting, joining, or dove-tailing the actual material.

It will therefore be the author's first care to absorb his material : only thus can he steep himself, so to speak, in his subject ; and until he is full of his subject he cannot hope to do anything with it. But the subject once in his mind, he carries it with him wherever he goes ; he returns to it at every spare moment ; he dwells upon it, turns it over and over, and looks at it from every side ; until at last the form in which the story must be told is clearly defined, and he has only to take his pen and write. And now he could not, if he would, give forth his materials in the form in which he received them. They have taken shape and colour in his mind ; they have received the impress of his character ; they are stamped, for good or for ill, with his image and superscription. He has

made the subject his own; and, as his own, he now offers it to others.

We have dealt in detail with this process of transformation, because it is the one to which the author who draws from written sources must, almost necessarily, subject his material. But the author who draws direct from life, works under totally different conditions. To him the collection of material is a constant source of pleasure and interest. Moreover, no two authors will deal in the same way with this material, and therefore no definite rules for its treatment can be laid down. Speaking generally, we may say that one author clothes, a second idealises, a third transmutes his material. But we are nevertheless fully aware that no accurate classification is possible, and that the rules already laid down are but partially applicable here. We can but observe the practice of various authors, in the hope of discovering the methods by which their ends have been attained.

Let us look first at the work of the author who clothes his material. He gives an account of his experiences, looked at, indeed, with the poet's eye, and drawn with the true artist's touch; yet, none the less, a true statement of actual fact. To this class belong Stevenson's "Inland Voyage," his "Travels with a Donkey," and the greater number of his essays.

For an example of the idealising process we turn to Charlotte Brontë. The ideal presupposes the real; and we shall find that this authoress drew largely upon her own life and experience for the material of her books. What she made of that material we all know. It was fused and welded in the furnace of her passionate nature; it was lit up by the lurid fires of her

genius: but while she idealised and glorified, she never, for one moment, lost sight of reality. Her characters are portraits; her incidents and scenery are drawn from nature with extraordinary fidelity; the very poetry in her books is a faithful reflection of the poetry that underlies actual life. But all is seen through the glow of a fervid imagination; and thus all is transfigured, both for herself and for her readers.

Our example of transmutation will be drawn from George Eliot's works. She, like Charlotte Brontë, drew upon her own life and experience for all that is best in her novels. The materials of "Adam Bede," "Silas Marner," and "The Mill on the Floss" were not collected; they were unconsciously absorbed in the impressionable years of childhood and youth. So far, her experience tallies with that of Charlotte Brontë, but here the resemblance ceases. All Charlotte Brontë's novels were written in youth; her materials were given forth almost as soon as they were received; what she saw and felt, that she wrote; no distance mellowed the view, no lapse of time softened the impression; and thus what her work gained in vividness and intensity it lost in maturity.

But with George Eliot it was far otherwise. Her material lay unused in her mind for many years, and during those years it underwent a change. What had been unconsciously absorbed was as unconsciously transmuted. "It had come to her, Life; it went from her, Truth. It had come to her, short-lived Actions; it went out from her, Immortal Thoughts. It had come to her, Business; it went from her, Poetry. It was dead Fact; now it is quick Thought."¹

¹ Altered from Emerson.

Of this change, the greatest which the author's material can undergo, we can only say that it is the result of the direct operation of genius; but the *modus operandi* of creative genius must always remain a mystery for the ordinary mind.

CHAPTER VIII

STYLE

The author's manner as important as his matter—The reader's enjoyment dependent upon style—Definitions by M. Arnold, Fénelon, Isaac Disraeli and Schopenhauer—Style includes the mode of thinking as well as expression—Style the outcome of character as well as intellect—Infinite variety—Good style may be acquired—Study of Classics the best education.

“Le style est l'homme même.”—BUFFON.

“Style is a revealer of secrets, and will often betray what an author would gladly conceal ; and, indeed, that author alone is safe who has nothing to conceal.”

HITHERTO we have been occupied with the author's matter ; we come now to a subject no less important—his manner or style. He has thoughts which he desires to utter : how is he to utter them ? Before attempting an answer to this inquiry (which will be a somewhat serious undertaking) there is a preliminary question which claims our attention. Why does the author desire to utter his thoughts ? What is his object in writing ? The answer is simple. He writes that he may convey to other minds the thoughts that are in his own. He writes his book that it may be read ; if it is not read, he has failed in his

main object ; and his labour, so far, at least, as others are concerned, has been thrown away.

If, then, a book comes into being for no other purpose except that it may be read, it will be the author's first care to make it readable. For there is as yet, as Walter Bagehot reminds us, "No Act of Parliament compelling people to read ; if we wish them to read, we must make reading pleasant."

Now, the pleasure which we derive from a book depends less upon its subject than upon the style in which that subject is handled. To speak truth, the subject is very much at the mercy of the author. There are authors who can make the dullest subject enthralling to the reader ; and, on the other hand, there is probably no subject, however interesting, which could not be made intolerable by bad handling. "Do not sermons exist, and are they not a warning to mankind ?" As a matter of fact, the subject of a book is, to most readers, of comparatively little importance. There are always two or three subjects which are, for the time, absorbing to the public mind ; but, outside these, the author may choose where he will. The number of those who read a book for the sake of the information which it contains is comparatively small : the majority of readers read for enjoyment alone. And by a wise instinct ; for "no profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en." The information which is laboriously acquired for a special purpose is apt to fade from the mind when it has answered that purpose ; whereas what is read with delight is likely to be re-read and remembered.

Now, this delight, however little the reader may be aware of it, is the result of the author's style. It is

his special office to make his subject, whatever it may be, interesting to the reader. The interest of the book, therefore, depends rather upon the author than upon the subject.

We tacitly acknowledge this in ordinary life. The book-lover does not ask the subject of a new book, he asks the name of the author. If the author be one whom he knows and loves, he will order the book whatever be the subject; if he knows nothing of the author, he will usually be content to know nothing of the book.

But it is time to inquire into the nature of this style, upon which so much depends. What is its source? What does the term include? Is it a natural gift, or can it be acquired? When we consider the interest and importance of this subject, we are surprised to find that so little has been written upon it. It is, however, possible to collect a few opinions from widely different sources.

"Style, in my sense of the word," says Matthew Arnold, "is a peculiar re-casting and heightening, under a certain condition of spiritual excitement, of what a man has to say, in such a manner as to add dignity and distinction to it." But this, although it is an admirable description of the process by which an author reaches his best manner, gives no account whatever of the source of that manner.

Fénélon and Isaac Disraeli come nearer to the truth; the first pronouncing that style is as much a part of a man as his face, his figure, or the throbbing of his pulse; the second, that an author's style cannot be taken from him, and that it is, in truth, the only thing that he can call his own. Both these sayings point to

some vital connection between the author and his style. But it has been reserved for Schopenhauer, with his fine literary instinct, to go straight to the heart of the matter. "Style," he says, "is the physiognomy of the mind, and a safer index to character than the face." From this definition we draw more than one important conclusion. First, if style be the physiognomy of the mind, it follows that the term must include not only the author's mode of expressing his thought, but his mode of thinking—his way, that is, of looking at his subject; and, indeed, as we shall hope to show hereafter, the two cannot be separated.

Secondly, if style be an index to character, it must be the expression of character—it must be the offspring of character as well as of intellect. So, indeed, it is. "*Le style est l'homme même.*" Hence arises infinite variety in style. There is not one good style to which every author must train himself, but each author has a style, as he has a character, of his own; and thus there are as many varieties of good style as there are good authors.

If we compare the works of our English essayists, of Bacon, Macaulay, Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, Thomas de Quincey, or, to come to more recent times, Matthew Arnold and Robert Louis Stevenson, we readily recognise that the style of each corresponds with the character of the man. In truth, it cannot be otherwise. We can do things only in our own way. No one of these could have written in the style of any of the others, nor could any of them impart his style to another.

But here it may be asked, If style cannot be imparted, how can it be learned? And, If we can do

things only in our own way, what is to be done if that way is a bad way? Here again the answer is simple. We must set to work to make our own way a good way. If we cannot acquire a style like that of De Quincey or Charles Lamb, we may, nevertheless, acquire a good style of our own. The art of writing can be taught just as much, and just as little, as any other art. No artist can dispense with instruction : to attempt it would be to reject the experience of all who have gone before him ; but mere instruction never made an artist yet. It is only the technical part of an art that can be actually imparted. The painter learns to mix and lay on his colours ; the singer learns to produce and manage his voice ; and, in like manner, the writer may learn from teachers the technicalities of his art. But when each has thus learned his language, he will use it in his own way, to express his own thoughts and feelings ; he will say what he pleases, and he will say it as he pleases ; and this is what we mean when we say that he has a style of his own.

But we learn from others much more than they voluntarily teach us. By far the most important part of the artist's education comes to him from the study of the masterpieces of his art. The painter must visit picture-galleries ; the singer must hear the greatest performers ; and the intending author will make himself familiar with the English classics. He will steep his mind, or, as Charles Kingsley beautifully expresses it, "bathe his spirit in their noble thoughts, as in May-dew ; and feel himself thereby, if but for an hour, more fair." We learn to speak, not from grammars, but by living with those who speak good English ; we learn

good manners, not from books of etiquette, but in good society; and in precisely the same way we imperceptibly acquire a good style by living in the best of all society—that is, with the best authors.

Nothing is more infectious than style. It is hardly too much to say that it would be impossible for any one brought up upon our English classics to write in a bad style. On the other hand, it would be equally impossible that any one whose reading had been confined to newspaper and magazine articles, should possess a good style. Walter Pater was afraid to read the works of Robert Louis Stevenson lest his own style should suffer!

But it is time to offer a few practical suggestions on the cultivation of style; and this is a subject so important that it demands a new chapter.

CHAPTER IX

STYLE—OBSCURITY AND CLEARNESS

Obscurity the worst fault of style—Some causes of obscurity—Thought not clear—The author's familiarity with his subject—Preponderance of thought over expression—Condensation—Love of epigram—Diffuseness—Obscurity suggestive of hidden treasure—Clearness of style—Clear thought—Definite statement—Simplicity—Method—Natural order—Minds not normally constituted—Arrangement of sentences—Metaphor.

"Nothing is easier than to write so that no one can understand."—SCHOPENHAUER.

"Say 'yes' or 'no,' Sir, if your language is capable of expressing so fine a distinction."

WE have seen that it is the author's object to make his book readable; we have now to inquire what is the first characteristic of a readable book; or, since it is always easier to analyse annoyance than pleasure, what is the quality which, more than any other, makes a book unreadable? To this question there can be but one reply. Of all faults of style, obscurity is the most disastrous and intolerable—disastrous to the author, whose object it is to make himself understood, which object obscurity frustrates at the outset; and intolerable to the reader, who is exasperated by finding himself obliged to read each

sentence several times before he can discover its meaning. He feels, and justly, that the author has not done his fair share of the work, but has left half of it to the reader. For it is clearly the author's part to do the thinking, as well as to express the thought; but this author has left the reader to discover the thought, and to express it for himself before he can hope to understand it. True, the reader holds the remedy in his own hands. He may, and probably will, decline to do the author's work as well as his own, and thus the book will remain unread. Now, this is a penalty which a writer does not willingly incur. He will therefore resolve, at the outset, that whatever may be his faults of style, obscurity shall not be one of them. He can make his meaning clear if he will; or, if he cannot, he has mistaken his vocation.

In the present chapter we propose to consider, first, some of the causes of obscurity; and, secondly, some of the conditions favourable to clearness of style.

First, some causes of obscurity. (1) There can be no doubt that the most common cause of obscurity is that the thought which the author is trying to express is not perfectly clear to his own mind. He sees it dimly, and thus he does not really know what he is trying to say. He attempts to hide his uncertainty behind cleverly constructed sentences; but obscurity cannot be hidden. It is, at all events, painfully clear to the reader that he does not understand the author's meaning. The principle to be applied here has been indicated in the chapter on "Thinking." The thought which the writer wishes to express "has not been steeped long enough in the soul." He must "brood long over it, and wait patiently till it shines." When

the thought is clear, it will naturally take shape in clear speech.

(2) A very different cause of obscurity is the following: the author has been familiar with his subject for so long, he is so minutely acquainted with all its details, that he does not realise the difficulties which it presents to other minds, and thus fails to make it clear. An obvious remedy for obscurity of this nature would be the discussion of the subject with some friend before the manuscript goes to press. This would give the author the opportunity of seeing the matter from the standpoint of the general reader; and so would enable him at once to remove all difficulties.

(3) Obscurity may arise from the preponderance of the thinking faculty over the powers of expression. The thought itself appears to fill the mind so completely that it prevents the free action of the other faculties. The thinker—for we can hardly call him a writer—cannot get his thought out, and the effort to do so is painful. Only a very strong motive will make this man write at all; usually, after a time, he abandons the attempt. Nor is this greatly to be regretted, for, although his thoughts are thus lost to the world, they would be no less lost if he were to publish them in an unreadable form; and what is written with difficulty is usually read with difficulty, if, indeed, it is read at all. Should he, however, be disposed to persevere, he will best cultivate his powers of expression by deliberately fitting with words every event that passes before his eyes, as well as his own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. There is no doubt that this defect can be overcome; and there is this encouragement to

perseverance—that the thoughts of such writers are usually well worth expressing. There is a suggestion of this preponderance of thought over the power of expression in the writings of Thomas Carlyle.

(4) Another cause of obscurity is the author's inability to elaborate. In his hands, a subject is a kind of concentrated essence ; he condenses it until he has crushed all the life and interest out of it. It is his natural tendency to compress material for a whole chapter into some half-dozen sentences, and thus he presents his thoughts in masses. Now the mind of the general reader is not prepared to receive masses ; they tax his powers too severely. He prefers that they should be broken up and offered to him in morsels ; thus, only, can he digest and assimilate them. What is necessary for this author is to divide and subdivide his subject, and to deal separately with each division in turn.

(5) The love of aphorism or epigram, carried to excess, may be a cause of obscurity. The writer with this taste must have every matter in a nutshell ; and so he clips and pares his sentence, he removes this word and that, till the remaining words are too few to convey his entire meaning. Joubert confesses that this is his own tendency ; he describes it as an attempt to do without words, "to get a whole book into a page, a whole page into a phrase, and this phrase into one word." This is a fault which usually cures itself, for a very little experience suffices to show that there are many thoughts which cannot be compressed into a nutshell ; and, after all, the true author seeks not the neatest, not the cleverest, but the most complete expression for his thought.

(6) One of the commonest causes of obscurity, especially among inexperienced writers, is diffuseness. They have an impression that fluency is a fine thing ; and accordingly they pour forth a torrent of words, in which any little meaning that they may once have had is carried away and lost. The first thing of which these writers need to be convinced is that this flow of words is not a thing to be proud of, but rather that it is a failing which should be sharply checked. For it weakens as well as obscures the style ; and it is, moreover, the unmistakable mark of deficient mental training. Nothing but education will effectually cure this tendency, but the writer who is alive to it, may do much to keep it in check. Even in ordinary conversation he may practise expressing himself in words few and to the point. The attempt "to get a whole book into a page, a whole page into a phrase, and that phrase into one word," would be an invaluable exercise for a writer of this description.

But diffuseness may have a more questionable origin. It is too often the sign-manual of the spurious author—of that writer who, having little or nothing to say, writes with the deliberate intention of making that little go a long way, and of saying nothing in as many words as possible. To him, language is not "the art of concealing thought" ; it is the art of concealing the absence of thought. Such work as this would receive its equivalent if it were paid for in false coin. This evil is beyond remedy ; and the only hope for such a writer lies in the renunciation of the literary career, and the adoption of some calling which he can pursue honestly.

We have said many hard things of obscurity, but

there is an obscurity which is suggestive of hidden treasure. It stimulates the reader's curiosity: he is convinced that if he could succeed in penetrating to the author's meaning, that meaning would reward his pains. The poems of George Herbert, and of other writers of the same era, furnish examples of obscurity of this nature. It springs rather from the difficulty of the thought than from defective expression.

We come now to the second part of our subject—the conditions favourable to clearness of style. From what has been already said, it will be seen that clear speech is the natural outcome of clear thought, and that accordingly the first requisite for a clear style is that the writer should know exactly what he wishes to say. Schopenhauer says that if a writer has something to say, he has almost all that is necessary for a good style; so certain is it, that a man who is determined to be understood will contrive to express himself clearly and well.

The author should, by all means, make his statements as definite as possible. The positiveness with which some young writers are charged may indeed be a fault, but it is a fault full of promise, and infinitely preferable to that fear of saying anything questionable, which leads a writer to guard his statements, and leave himself openings for retreat in every sentence. If he be in doubt on any point, it is best to say so plainly, and give the reasons for his uncertainty.

Another important element of clearness is simplicity. For every reason, simple and ordinary words will serve the writer best. The greatest writers use simple words, and find that these suffice for all their needs. "Simplicity," says Schopenhauer, "has always been held to

be a mark of truth ; it is also a mark of genius." Emerson so completely identifies simplicity with greatness, that he says, "To be simple is to be great." The true author selects his words on one principle only : he chooses those that best express his thought, and uses them as often as they are wanted. Inexperienced writers have often a morbid dread of tautology ; and to avoid this they collect a number of words which they believe to be synonyms, and use them alternately. Such a method makes the accurate expression of thought impossible. Change the word, and the idea is changed. If one word represents the author's thought, any other word will represent something that is not his thought. It may often be necessary to use the same word several times in one paragraph, or even in one sentence. In such a case, the writer may console himself with the reflection, that tautology proper consists in the repetition of ideas rather than of words.

Again, method and order contribute greatly to clearness of style. If the writer sets down his thoughts at haphazard, without any attempt at classification or arrangement, the reader will not carry away any connected idea of the contents of his book. Yet this arrangement should not be arbitrary, but should grow out of the nature of the subject. Every subject has an order of its own, which is "the order of Nature itself, and so the order of greatest force, and inimitable by any art." This order the writer should set himself to discover ; and, having discovered it, should strictly adhere to it. Facts should either be classified according to species, or arranged in order of time. In dealing with an abstract subject, the writer will do well to note the order in which the thoughts arose in his own mind,

and how one thought grew out of another. This, if the constitution of his mind be normal, is the natural order—the order, that is, in which the same thoughts would naturally arise in other minds, and which will therefore ensure the ready reception of his ideas. For an arbitrary arrangement—an arrangement, that is, peculiar to his own mind—he could count on no such reception.

And here we come upon another cause of obscurity, and one difficult, if not impossible, to remove. There are minds which are not normally constituted, and to which thoughts present themselves in an order which is the reverse of that in which they arise in ordinary minds. The works of these authors will always present a difficulty to the normal mind, and probably to the last the author will be unable to understand wherein the difficulty lies. It is the opinion of some critics, that much of the obscurity with which Robert Browning is charged, is due to this cause. To the ordinary reader, the arrangement of his thoughts seems arbitrary even to affectation ; yet to himself, it was probably the order which appeared most natural.

But clearness of style depends not only upon the order in which the thoughts are presented, but upon the order and arrangement of the various parts of the sentence. Those words and clauses which are most nearly related should follow each other closely. Above all, the sentence should be so arranged that its meaning should dawn upon the reader's mind at the earliest possible moment. To expect him to carry the early part of a long sentence in his mind, holding his thought in suspense, until, at the end of the sentence, the author's drift becomes perceptible, is to ask too

much of him. It is, says Schopenhauer, "to give him a great deal to learn by heart, and nothing to understand."

There is no subject which does not gain in clearness by the happy use of appropriate metaphor. A telling illustration appeals to every class of reader ; it delights the intellectual as much as it enlightens the unlearned. For conveying an abstract idea to the ordinary mind, it is invaluable ; for it clothes the abstract in a concrete form, and thus gives the mind something to lay hold of. We are sometimes reminded that an illustration is not an argument ; but at least it often finds its way where an argument cannot enter, and carries conviction with it. It is like teaching by pictures : the image remains in the mind, and, with the image, the thought which it illustrates.

In the use of metaphor, the writer should bear in mind one simple rule : he must never lose sight of the literal meaning of the word which he is using metaphorically. This will save him from that mixing of heterogeneous metaphors, which is the sport of the critics. For example, the author who wrote of "weapons, forged in the arena of controversy," lost sight of the fact that an arena is not a forge ; and that the combatant who entered the arena before his weapons were in existence, would be likely to come badly off in any encounter.

There is a very interesting passage on the use of imagery in Emerson's essay on "Language," to which the reader will find it well worth his while to refer.

CHAPTER X

STYLE—FORCE

Author's object, to carry his reader with him—To this end, force essential—Force includes matter as well as manner—Elements of force—Simplicity, directness, conciseness—True nature of force—Personal influence—Its sources—Strong personality—Conviction, passion, concentration—Carlyle, C. Brontë, Mr. R. Kipling—Control—Example of powerful writing.

"It makes a great difference to the force of any sentence, whether there be a man behind it, or no."—EMERSON.

"It need not be long, but it will take you a long time to make it short."

WE have now reached this point: the author writes clearly, that his book may be read and understood; but this is, after all, but a part of his object—it is, indeed, nothing but a means to an end. It would be small satisfaction to him to have made himself understood, if his thoughts excited hostility or derision, or even if they were received with indifference. The ultimate end for which he writes is that he may carry his readers with him; that he may make them see what he sees, and, if it may be, feel what he feels. Now, if he is to succeed in this, if his thoughts are to enter into other minds and take possession, both thought and expression must be not

only clear, but forcible. We do not forget that Truth has a power of its own, and that by the philosopher or truth-seeker it has only to be clearly seen to be embraced. But the majority of men and women are neither philosophers nor truth-seekers, and these are the better for some energy in the writer—to these, a forcible style is the hammer that drives in the truth.

What, then, is this force? In considering this question, the first thing that strikes us, is that only in a limited sense can it be regarded as a branch of style at all. The widest interpretation of the term "style," will not cover all that is included in the idea of force. This becomes evident if we compare force with clearness. Any thought, however shallow, feeble, or commonplace, can be expressed clearly; but such a thought could not be expressed forcibly. There must be weight in the matter, or there can be no force in the expression. Thus while clearness relates to manner alone, force includes both manner and matter.

In the present chapter we propose to consider : first, Force, as a branch of style ; secondly, its true nature ; thirdly, its sources.

It is a happy thing for the author that the simplicity, directness and order, which contribute to clearness of style contribute also to force ; so that while he is teaching himself to write clearly, he is, at the same time, preparing himself to write forcibly. But, of all the elements of force, the most important has yet to be named. This is conciseness. As intentional diffuseness marks the spurious author, so conciseness is an unmistakable sign of the author who is born, not made.

The true author is never at a loss for material ; his

difficulty, on the contrary, is to bring all that he has to say within reasonable limits. Many volumes might be written upon his subject : he has, we will suppose, only the opportunity of writing one ; therefore the essence of the many must be contained in the one. Yet he will omit nothing that is either interesting or important ; he will say all that is in his heart, but he will compress it into a small compass. Thus his style is like a full stream flowing between high banks ; the narrower the channel the stronger will be the current. "Good work," says Balthazar Gracian, "is doubly good if it is short." This power of saying much in few words is an enviable gift ; and those who have not the gift should by all means endeavour to acquire it. As an element of force it cannot be overrated ; and it may be added that there is nothing which so readily cuts its way to the heart of an editor or publisher, as a terse and trenchant style. But while we speak of force as the result of simplicity, directness, and terseness, we must not forget that it does not depend for its existence upon these qualities ; and that it would be truer to say that force finds its natural expression in a simple, direct and terse style.

Take, for example, the force that springs from earnestness. The man who is in deadly earnest does not cast about him for flowers of rhetoric, he has no need of "meretricious graces," but he takes that "straight road" which "is ever the shortest way," and thus he goes direct to the hearts of his readers.

And this at once opens our eyes to the true nature of force. It is nothing less than personal influence ; for it is the power of one mind over another. The personality of the author is so strongly impressed upon

his writings, that it dominates and masters the mind of the reader ; he cannot escape from its influence. Nor has he the least wish to escape ; on the contrary, there is a singular fascination for him, in being thus swept into a current of thoughts and emotions stronger than his own, and he will return again and again, to yield himself to the same subtle spell. For he recognises that this is the ideal relation between author and reader, and that this rare pleasure is the highest that a book can give.

We have said that this pleasure is rare ; it is so, because the qualities upon which it depends are rare. The men who possess the power of dominating the minds of others are few, and, of these few, only a small minority find a field for their powers in the literary career. These, however, are the true authors ; that is, they are authors by a kind of natural right. In pursuing this calling they "discharge the very office for which they were born."

But it is time to inquire into the sources of this force. Leaving on one side the overmastering power of genius, as beyond the scope of the present treatise, we shall confine ourselves to those sources of force which are within the reach of the ordinary author. We have seen that behind the forcible expression lies the forcible thought ; that the forcible thought depends for its existence upon weighty matter ; and that underlying all these there is a strong personality, or some marked characteristic in the author. Of these characteristics, the most important are conviction, passion and concentration.

The man of strong conviction has not only something definite to say, but he has a vehement impulse to

say it. He is profoundly convinced both of its truth and of its importance to mankind ; and for these reasons he cannot keep it to himself : he must needs share it with others. "He is sure that if they only knew what he knows, they would feel as he feels, and believe as he believes. And by this, he conquers. This living faith, this enthusiasm, this confidence, call it as we will, is an extreme power in human affairs."

We have a good example of this force in the writings of Thomas Carlyle. Even those who are most strongly repelled by his crabbed style and German mannerisms, find themselves compelled to bow before his power, and recognise it as the result of his intense belief in his own message.

Equally potent, but far more rare, is the force that is born of passion. Those who are capable of the overmastering emotions which we call passion, are never a numerous class ; and of these only a small minority pour their passion into any intellectual channel. And when we consider that, of this minority, the greater number find the readiest opening for their talents in the career of the public speaker, and that the few who turn their attention to literature are, for the most part, poets, we shall see that the number of prose authors who draw their power from this source is exceedingly small. They are, however, so remarkable that they cannot be ignored. Their power over the hearts of their readers is absolute. Heat begets heat ; and the strong feeling which moves the author as he writes, awakens a prompt echo in the heart of the reader. A very striking example of this kind of force is supplied by the novels of Charlotte Brontë. "Villette," she herself tells us,

was written with her heart's blood. This is the secret of the power which enchains generation after generation of readers. It has its root in the elemental forces of human nature, and thus it is unaffected by lapse of time or change of custom.

Lastly, there is the author whose power is the result of concentration. This writer has not a little in common with the man of strong conviction, for both focus their energies upon a single object, both pour the whole force of their being into a single channel. A writer of this type does not engage in a multitude of undertakings and divide his attention among them, but he allows one subject to fill his mind, to the exclusion of every other. He is "a whole man to that one thing." This concentration of thought issues in a corresponding concentration of style. Every word has its use, and every sentence is big with meaning. Once more we go to Mr. Rudyard Kipling for our example. Many of his "Plain Tales from the Hills," and the sketches "In Black and
* White," are masterpieces of concentration.

It must not be forgotten that force, to be effectual, needs to be controlled and directed. The author must play the part of charioteer. He must drive, and not be driven; still less must he be run away with. The more powerful his steeds, the more imperative is the need of a firm hand upon the rein. Without control, conviction becomes fanaticism, passion degenerates into lawlessness, strength into violence.

The following verses are cited, not as a model for imitation, but as an example of exceedingly powerful writing, achieved by very natural means. Yet those

means, when analysed, will be found to contain all the principal elements of force.

(A word of explanation may be necessary here. The steamer is on fire. Jim Bludso holds the boat against the bank till all, save himself, have escaped.)

“Through the hot black breath of the burning boat

Jim Bludso’s voice was heard ;

And they all had trust in his cussedness,

And knew he would keep his word.

And sure’s you’re born, they all got off

Afore the smoke-stacks fell,

And Bludso’s ghost went up alone

In the smoke of the *Prairie Belle*.

He weren’t no saint—but at judgment

I’d run my chance with Jim

’Longside of some pious gentleman

That wouldn’t shake hands with him.

He’d seen his duty,—a dead sure thing,—

And went for it there and then ;

And Christ is not going to be too hard

On a man that died for men.”¹

¹ From Col. John Hay’s “Pike County Ballads.”

CHAPTER XI

STYLE—FINISH

Fourfold revision—1. Read the whole aloud—2. Bring into one key—3. Remove ambiguity—4. Strike out unnecessary words—Opening sentences to strike key-note of the whole—Should not be written first—Practical suggestions—Graceful conclusion desirable—Not indispensable—When matter exhausted, any conclusion welcome—Opinion of a competent critic desirable.

"We want the finish of a clean, round bullet, rather than that of a chestnut-burr. We don't want the finish that rats give to cheese ; after they've finished it, there's nothing left."—W. HUNT.

LET us suppose that the writer has now completed his composition. He has said what he has to say, as clearly, as simply and as forcibly as he can ; he has carefully revised each part before laying it aside ; nothing now remains but to judge of its merits as a whole, and to add finishing touches where these are needed. The object of this final revision is fourfold : first, to test the style ; secondly, to bring the whole into harmony ; thirdly, to make sure that every sentence is intelligible ; fourthly, to remove every unnecessary word.

First, he desires to test the style. He will do this

best by reading the whole composition aloud, going through as much as possible at one sitting. The importance of this method of testing the work, is perhaps hardly realised by those who are in the habit of reading only to themselves; but it is a fact that faults of style start into prominence when read aloud, which otherwise might pass unnoticed. The severity of the test makes it valuable. It is hardly too much to say, that a book is well written, if it will bear reading aloud.

Secondly, the entire composition must be harmonised, or brought into one key. It has been written at different times, and, consequently, in different moods, and with varying degrees of success. There are chapters which, in the writer's opinion, represent his best work, and others with which he is not a little disappointed. These last he will now endeavour to raise to the level of the first. In order to do this he will imbue his mind thoroughly with the style of the successful chapters, and go through the inferior chapters while still under their influence. By this means, the alterations needed to bring the whole into harmony will naturally suggest themselves.

Thirdly, he has to consider whether each sentence is intelligible, and whether the several sentences are so arranged, as to present the subject to the reader in the clearest possible light. The wise author does not presuppose any great degree of intelligence, or even of attention, in his readers. They will misunderstand him if possible; it is his part to see that this shall be impossible. He will therefore read each sentence with a view to discover whether any

construction, other than that intended by himself, can, by possibility, be put upon it. If so, the ambiguity must be removed, and the sentence re-cast, so as to bear but one meaning.

Fourthly, he will go through the manuscript from beginning to end, and strike out every unnecessary word. For there is no *viâ media* for words; they are either essential or they are pernicious; they make for strength and clearness, or they weaken and obscure. Above all, redundant adjectives and adverbs should be avoided; they are a confession of weakness on the part of the author, and a cause of weakness in his style.

Throughout, it will be the author's endeavour to strengthen weak points, and to make rough places smooth. But although it is his object to make the sentences flow easily and smoothly, yet he will bear in mind that it is possible to polish so highly that individuality suffers, and that smoothness may become monotony. Ruggedness is not always a disadvantage; it may serve to arrest attention, and at least it gives the mind something to lay hold of. "Real finish," says William Hunt, "must be of the same quality as real beginning"; and the hint is a valuable one.

The opening sentences of his composition will probably cost the writer more trouble than any other part of his work. And this is natural; for upon these opening sentences much depends: they are laden with heavy responsibilities. To arrest attention, to excite interest, to create a strong desire to read the book to which they form the introduction—these are but a part of the onerous duties which fall to their share. At the very

least, they should strike the key-note of the entire work, and strike it clearly and firmly.

Now, it is impossible, at the outset of any literary undertaking, that the author should foresee exactly the road along which he is likely to travel. He has a general idea of what he is going to do with his subject, but he does not know what his subject is going to do with him. He must follow where it leads, and it may lead him far, before he obtains a clear view of all that his undertaking involves. Until he has this view he cannot, in a few sentences, strike the key-note of the whole. It is well, therefore, to postpone the writing of the opening sentences until he is thoroughly aware of the course which his work is likely to take. To write them at the beginning is usually a waste of labour ; for as he proceeds with his work, and the subject opens out before him, he realises the inadequacy of that view of it which was embodied in his introductory remarks.

Upon this point it is not easy to make any practical suggestions. One hint, however, may be offered. It is always interesting to trace the connection between the special subject selected, and some more general subject of which it forms a part. For example, historical biography must, almost inevitably, be preceded by a slight sketch of the period to which the hero belongs. For there is truth in the saying that "the age makes the man" ; and the question how far the character and powers of the individual are the product of the period to which he belongs, would make an interesting introductory chapter.

It is, however, quite permissible to dispense with a formal introduction, and to plunge boldly into the

subject. There is, perhaps, a certain abruptness in this sudden plunge; yet, if it be the method most natural to the writer, it may serve better than any other to awaken the interest of the reader. For there is a reality in what we do naturally which has a power of its own.

What is true of the opening is true of the concluding sentences. A graceful or striking conclusion—one that shall sum up all that has gone before, or produce the effect of a climax—may be necessary to the perfection of the composition, but it is not an indispensable part of it; whereas it is indispensable that the author should stop, when he has said all that he has to say. Many subjects come quietly and naturally to an end, without abruptness; but the most startling abruptness is preferable to the spectacle of the author who, having exhausted his material, “goes on saying nothing,” in the hope of stumbling upon a concluding sentence. If a graceful conclusion is beyond his power, he may be consoled by the reflection that when he has finished what he has to say, the reader will welcome a conclusion of any kind, and may, indeed, be trusted to provide one for himself, by closing the book.

The writer has now completed his revision; he has formed his own judgment upon his work, but this does not wholly satisfy him, and he would be glad, if possible, to have a second opinion. He has lived long alone with his subject; it lies so near his heart that there is no perspective in his view of it: it will be an advantage to let in light and air from the world outside. If, then, he is so happy as to have a friend upon whose experience and judgment he can rely, he will carry his manuscript to that friend for criticism. But unless

he knows that the critic's opinion will be valuable, it is better not to ask it. The suggestions of incompetent persons are only perplexing. To quote William Hunt once more, "Don't mind what your friends say of your work. In the first place, they all think you're an idiot; in the next place, they expect great things of you; in the third place, they wouldn't know if you did a good thing."

If, however, the writer does not number a competent critic among his friends, he will find himself able to form a very fair estimate of his own work, if he lays aside the manuscript for a few months, and forgets it as far as possible. On returning to his composition, its defects will strike him as forcibly as if he now made its acquaintance for the first time. Even experienced authors are often glad to keep a finished manuscript for a time, before sending it to the publisher, especially if it is on an important subject, and has been written with some heat.

CHAPTER XII

ORIGINALITY

Schopenhauer—Emerson—Carlyle—Originality defies analysis—Comparison between ordinary and original minds—Novelty not essential—Originality an affinity with reality—Carlyle on the original man—Mental vigour—Danger from formalism and unbelief—Dr. Johnson and his worn-out shoes—Symbolic—Originality a gift—May be cultivated—Methods of first author those of all original thinkers—Originality includes both thought and expression—Plagiarism—Charge often undeserved—The same thoughts in many minds—Plagiarist appropriates language as well as thought—Examples of plagiarism—Plot—Illustration—Title.

“Opinion native to the speaker is sweet and refreshing, and inseparable from his image.”—EMERSON.

“When everybody is original, then life will be worth living. A few people half dare to express themselves, and how interesting they are !”—W. HUNT.

IN approaching this interesting but difficult subject, we are struck with the fact that very little has been written upon it. Our great thinkers appear to have left it almost untouched. Schopenhauer, indeed, in his “Art of Literature,”¹ has a chapter “On Thinking for Oneself,” and Emerson has an essay on “Quotation and Originality”; but neither of these authors has brought to bear upon the subject the great analytical powers of which he is master. Carlyle, in

¹ This is the translator's title for a volume of Essays taken from Schopenhauer's “Parerga.”

his "Hero Worship," has occasion, more than once, to allude to originality ; and we learn more from these passing glimpses, than from the complete essays of the other two.

It may well be that the subject defies analysis, and that even if it were possible to tabulate the qualities which appear to make up originality, we should find that the actual essence of the thing had, after all, escaped us. Yet this must not deter us from attempting an inquiry into its nature.

If there is one quality which all young writers are resolved to possess, it is originality ; yet how few could give an intelligent account of what they understand by the word ! And in truth, originality is singularly difficult, if not impossible, to define. We all have a general idea of what it is, we recognise it when we meet with it ; but when we attempt a definition, we find ourselves very much at a loss. It is possible that a comparison between the ordinary and the original mind, may put the clue into our hands.

The ordinary man allows others to do his thinking for him. It no more occurs to him that he ought to be the author of his own thoughts, than that he ought to be the maker of his own coats or hats. All these things are done better by others ; why, then, should he do them for himself ?

But the man of any originality does his thinking himself. He takes his subject, and looks it fairly in the face. He does not ask what this or that author has said about it ; that is no concern of his : his object is to strip it of all disguises, and penetrate to its very heart. And not only can he do this, but he cannot do otherwise. This necessity is laid upon

him ; it lies in the make of the man ; thus, and thus only, can he deal with his subject.

Now, while it is certain that what is discovered by this method will be true, it by no means follows that it will be new. Novelty, then, is not an essential element of originality. It is not necessary that this thinker should be "the first that ever burst into this silent sea." He is there, and he has found his way there alone ; it detracts no whit from his originality that others may have been there before him.

Now, the first thing that we have to remark about this man, is his sincerity. He is not striving after originality ; he is simply following where his own nature leads him. He has, if we may be allowed the expression, an affinity with reality. It is the reality within the man which demands reality without, and he will pierce through all outward shows and semblances, till he reaches it. "Such a man," says Carlyle, "is what we call an original man ; he comes to us at first hand. . . . We may call him Poet, Prophet, God ;—in one way or other, we all feel that the words he utters are as no other man's words."

Secondly, we are struck with his exceptional mental vigour. It is not easy to most of us to think for ourselves ; our minds are already filled to overflowing with the thoughts of others : often we cannot distinguish these from our own ; it is even conceivable that we have none of our own. We have, to a great extent, lost the power of seeing with our own eyes, hearing with our own ears, and even of thinking with our own brains. Now, this is just the power which the original thinker can never lose. It is not in his nature to see with other eyes, or to think with other

brains than his own. His own thoughts have so vigorous a life, that they cannot be overgrown by the thoughts of others ; they push their way up and overpower all that is not native to the soil.

To vary the simile. To most of us, the thoughts of others come like an invading army ; they pour into the mind, drive out the aborigines, and take possession. This, however, can only be done where the aborigines are weaker than the invaders. It can never befall the original thinker ; his mind is too strongly garrisoned by his own thoughts.

If, however, he stands in no danger from invasion, he is not without his own special perils. The worst foes that originality has to dread are formalism and unbelief. First, formalism. We are surrounded on all sides by a network of custom, convention and tradition, all good and needful in their own time and place, but liable to exist long after the reasons for their existence have passed away. Yet, even when obsolete, they cling about us like an atmosphere ; and in this atmosphere originality cannot breathe. It must destroy them, if it would not be destroyed by them. It was to this work—the destruction of dead forms—that our reformers addressed themselves ; and the result was that magnificent outburst of life and original thought, which gave us, among other things, the literature of the sixteenth century.

Secondly ; the spirit of unbelief is antagonistic to originality ; for unbelief can do nothing but destroy, whereas it is the function of originality to create and restore. It is true that originality is occasionally compelled to undertake the work of destruction ; yet this is only preparatory to its true work. “ The believing

man," says Carlyle, "is the original man"; and it is certain that if a man is to be a discoverer of truth, he must be a believer in the existence of that truth. That the unbelieving spirit is destructive of originality is abundantly proved by the literature of the eighteenth century.

It is related of Dr. Johnson, that when he was a servitor at Oxford, and struggling with actual poverty, a gentleman commoner who had noticed his worn-out shoes, placed a new pair outside his door. Johnson discovered them, took them up, peered at them with his short-sighted eyes; then, as the full meaning of the situation flashed upon him, he flung them into the street. Carlyle regards this action as symbolical of the mental attitude of all original thinkers. "It is," he says, "a type of the man's life, this pitching away of the shoes. An original man;—not a second-hand, borrowing or begging man. Let us stand on our own basis, at any rate! On such shoes as we ourselves can get. On frost and mud, if you will, but honestly on that;—on the reality and substance which Nature gives *us*, not on the semblance, or the thing She has given another than us."

We come now to the question, Is originality a gift, or can it be cultivated? Paradoxical as it may sound, both these questions can be answered in the affirmative. In the essay in which Stevenson recommends the imitation of the style of various authors, as a necessary part of the writer's training, he adds: "Perhaps, I hear some one cry out, 'But this is not the way to be original!' It is not; nor is there any way, except to be born so"; and it is indisputable that on this subject he speaks with authority.

Originality is, undoubtedly, a gift; but a gift may be great or small, and where it is small, it may be improved by cultivation.

First, originality may be cultivated by studying, and, as far as may be, by following the methods of the original thinker. These have been succinctly stated by Emerson, in his description of the manner in which the first book must have come into existence. He says: "The Scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon, gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again"; and the methods of "the Scholar of the first age," are those of the original thinker in every age.

(a) He "receives into him the world around"; that is, he goes to Life, to Nature, to Reality, for his materials.

(b) He broods over them and "gives them the new arrangement of his own mind." Schopenhauer compares the mind of the author to a mirror, which reflects every object which passes before it; but once within the mental mirror, the objects change their positions, form fresh combinations, and enter upon new relations. This is an admirable picture of the rearrangement of material which takes place in the mind of the original thinker.

(c) He utters his thought; and the originality of the expression will correspond with the originality of the thought. Here, if anywhere, we have a proof that the term "style" includes the author's manner of thinking, as well as his manner of expressing his thought. It would be impossible to express original thought in hackneyed phraseology. On the other hand, no phraseology, however unusual, can confer

originality upon a commonplace thought. It is not uncommon, in Tennyson's poems, to find ordinary thoughts expressed in ornate and elaborate language ; but such passages could not be characterised as original. On the contrary, a certain incongruity between the thought and the expression must strike every thoughtful reader. As the pebble is a pebble still, even when set in gold, so the ordinary thought remains incurably ordinary, however picturesque the garb in which it is clothed.

Secondly, the author who is cultivating originality will be careful to avoid fashionable phrases or expressions, however graphic or attractive these may be. As an author, he has nothing to do with ready-made expressions : it is his special office to make his own expressions ; that is, to clothe his thought in language intended for that thought, and for no other. As he would not clothe himself, so neither will he clothe his thoughts in second-hand garments.

But, in truth, language should be, not the clothing, but the "incarnation of thought." The relation between body and spirit affords an almost perfect illustration of the relation between language and thought. The thought, like the spirit, needs a body by means of which it can express and reveal itself. Without language, thought is like the disembodied spirit, which cannot make its presence known. On the other hand, language without thought is dead.

The subject of originality leads naturally to the consideration of its opposite, Plagiarism. The charge of plagiarism has so often been brought against those who in no way deserved it, that it may be well to inquire what the word actually means. It is com-

monly taken for granted that if a striking thought occurs in the pages of two authors, one of the two must have borrowed from the other. Yet surely this is an unwarrantable assumption. When the minds of many men are occupied with the same subject, it is inevitable that some at least among them should reach the same conclusions. At certain critical periods of history, the same thoughts have appeared simultaneously in so many minds, as to suggest the existence of a spiritual atmosphere in which they float, as seeds float in air, taking root wherever they find favourable soil. Every writer knows what it is to find his own thoughts, in books of whose very existence he was ignorant, at the time when he expressed those thoughts. On this subject, Schopenhauer has the following passage :—

“All those who think for themselves come, at bottom, to much the same conclusion. The differences they present are due to their different points of view ; when these do not affect the matter, they all speak alike. There are many passages in my works which I have given to the public only after some hesitation, because of their paradoxical nature ; and afterwards I have experienced a pleasant surprise in finding the same opinion recorded in the works of great men, who lived long ago.”

But even those who give to the world thoughts that did not originate with themselves, do not necessarily incur the charge of plagiarism. For in these days of many books, it is often impossible for a writer to distinguish between his own thoughts and those which have long been naturalised in his mind ; and, indeed, the more completely he makes the thoughts

of others his own, the less he can be said to steal them.

From all this it is evident that thoughts are not property, and cannot claim protection from the laws of copyright. For what, after all, is a thought but a perception of the truth? and truth can no more be monopolised than light and air.

But the matter takes on a different complexion when not the thought only, but the form in which it has been given to the world, is appropriated. For this can hardly be done unconsciously, since the same memory that carries away both thought and expression will usually retain some knowledge of the source whence these were derived, or, at all events, of the fact that they *were* derived.

It would seem, then, that the term "plagiarist" can only be rightly applied to those who borrow with intent to deceive; to those, that is, who deliberately give to the world as their own, the thoughts and even the words of others. For example, when we discover a passage, in books by different authors, expressed word for word in the same language, the only question is, Which is the plagiarist?

Again: if an author takes the plot of a foreign novel, and makes it the basis of an English story, he is guilty of plagiarism in its most pronounced form. Once more: there are certain illustrations which, from the moment that they are uttered, are felt to be the exclusive property of their originators. Such are Schopenhauer's "Style is the physiognomy of the mind," and Wordsworth's "Language is the incarnation of thought."

Schopenhauer mentions another method of the

plagiarist. For obvious reasons, it is impossible that the title of a book should be appropriated as it stands; but there are writers who take an existing title, and, changing one or two words, adopt it as their own. This is a singularly mean form of plagiarism. But it is needless to multiply examples. Let it suffice to say that plagiarism is theft; and that theft, even when unpunishable by law, is crime.

CHAPTER XIII

INSPIRATION

The limits of the author's powers—Inspiration (1) the heightening of the author's own powers; (2) an influx of power from without—The experience described—Inspiration necessary to poetry—Testimony of Shelley, Herrick, Emerson, and R. L. Stevenson—Effect of inspiration on art—Its source, the author's own mind—A region outside our consciousness—Slumbering memories—Mental possessions of which we are unconscious—Overflow of the outer circle into the inner.

"The Spirit speaks to me, and I write something down."
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN.

"After the subtlest analysis of the mental process, we must still say, as Dinah did, that our highest thoughts . . . are all given to us."—GEORGE ELIOT.

BEFORE entering upon this subject, it may be well to explain that the highest use of the word Inspiration, that, namely, which connects it with religion, will not be touched upon in the following pages. They will deal exclusively with the literary use of the word; with that inspiration which is the special endowment of the poet and the man of genius, and which occasionally visits the author who is neither genius nor poet. Moreover, the reader must be warned that this will not be, in any sense, a practical chapter. We can offer no suggestion—we can provide

no form of invocation—by which inspiration may be summoned to the aid of the writer. We can but attempt to describe an experience which defies explanation, and to state a problem of which neither philosophy nor exact science has, as yet, offered any solution.

We have seen that the writer becomes aware, very early in his career, that his powers are subject to serious variations ; but it is usually some time before he makes the further discovery that these same powers have very definite limits, and that within these limits all variations take place. In truth, the first discovery tends to postpone the second. He so quickly becomes accustomed to the fact that what is impossible on one day is easy on another, that it is long before he realises that there are things which he cannot do on any day ; they are beyond the limit of his powers. It is as though these powers were surrounded by an invisible barrier, within which they rise and fall, ebb and flow, but beyond which they cannot pass.

Meantime, he quickly discovers that the faculties which he himself cannot rouse into activity, may be stirred by influences from without. An inspiring book, a stimulating lecture, a talk with a congenial companion—any of these may arouse the dormant powers. These influences the author describes as inspiring : he tells us that he has drawn inspiration from this or that source ; and we are far from saying that this is not a legitimate use of the word. The “in-breathing” of energy into the author’s own powers may fairly claim the name of inspiration. Nevertheless, this is not the only, nor is it the highest use of the word. For in moments of true inspiration

the author is not so much aware of a reinforcement and heightening of his own powers, as of an influx of power from without, of which he is the passive recipient. A stream of thought, wholly new to him, clothed in language that is none of his, pours in upon his mind. To secure these thoughts he will leave any occupation—he will rise, if need be, in the middle of the night—and write at the dictation of his mysterious visitant, his only difficulty being to keep pace with the rush of thought.

Is it all true? he wonders; is it logical, connected, intelligible? To his own consciousness it appears to surpass anything he has ever written, but he can form no real judgment upon it; his powers are too completely in abeyance. But as he did not summon this influence, so neither can he retain it. Like a spirit it came—he knows not whence or how; like a spirit it goes—he knows not why. The only thing of which he is certain, is that he will not leave his desk so long as its voice can be heard. When at length this dies away, he will return to his bed, and—if his excitement will allow him—to sleep. In the morning when he awakes, he is his usual cool, critical self; and the whole incident appears to him not unlike a dream. The written pages on his desk, however, are no dream; and these he now examines with the keenest interest. Will they bear the sober light of reason? or will they “turn, like treacherous, fairy treasures, into dust”? In all probability, he will find that he has been under no delusion, and that what was written under that mysterious influence does, in reality, surpass anything that he could hope to produce by his own unaided powers.

Now, the experience which we have been attempting to describe is what is usually called poetic inspiration. Not that, as we might be tempted to suppose, the poet can summon it at will, (on the contrary, he is as much the victim of its caprices as any man), but that no true poetry can come into existence without it. The prose author values this power as highly as the poet ; he is often quite as much indebted to it ; but it is not essential to excellence in prose, whereas to poetry it is all-important.

Shelley, who knew more about poetic inspiration than any of his contemporaries, (Coleridge perhaps excepted), and who probably never wrote except under its influence, was fully aware of its intermittent and uncontrollable nature. In his essay on "The Defence of Poetry," he has the following remarkable passage :—

"Poetry," he says, "is not, like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet, even, cannot say it ; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness ; this power arises from within, . . . and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling, sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond expression. It is, as it were, the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own ; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose

traces remain only as on the wrinkled sand which paves it."

Herrick, again, is only giving voice to the universal experience of poets, when he says :

"'Tis not every day that I
Fitted am to prophesy ;
No, but when the spirit fills
The fantastic pannicles,
Full of fire, then I write
As the godhead doth indite.
Thus, enraged, my lines are hurled,
Like the Sybil's, through the world :
Look, how next the holy fire
Either slakes, or doth retire ;
So the fancy cools,—till when
That brave spirit comes again."

Emerson describes inspiration as "a tyrannous idea, emerging out of heaven, which seizes and bereaves us of liberty" ; but he deplotes its want of consecutiveness. It is, he says, "a flash of light, then a long darkness, then a flash again. . . . To-day the electric machine will not work, no spark will pass ; then, presently, the world is all a cat's back, all sparkle and shock."

Robert Louis Stevenson, while writing "Weir of Hermiston," described this experience while it was actually upon him, thus :—

"I see it all so clearly. The story unfolds itself before me to the least detail ; there is nothing left in doubt. I never felt so before in anything I ever wrote. It will be my best work ; I feel myself so sure in every word."

Such a consensus of testimony would be sufficient to establish the existence of this mysterious power,

even if no other evidence were available. But this is not the case. We ourselves recognise the effect of this influence in every branch of art, whether in painting, sculpture, music, or literature. Not only are we aware of its presence in the works of one author, and its absence from those of another, not only do we find it in full force in Charlotte Brontë's novels, and wholly absent from those of Maria Edgeworth, but even in the works of the same author we cannot but distinguish between those that were, and those that were not produced under this influence. That the same poet should have given us the "Sonnet composed upon Westminster Bridge" and "The Idiot Boy," that "Silas Marner" and "Brother Jacob" should have proceeded from the same pen—these are anomalies which can only be explained by the presence of inspiration in the one case, and its absence in the other. Nay, it is often possible, in George Eliot's novels, to lay our finger upon the very paragraph where inspiration ceases, and the authoress herself takes up the tale. Compare, for example, the early chapters of "Adam Bede" with chapter xvii.; and this is but one instance of many that might be cited.

It has been sometimes questioned, whether thoughts that come to an author from this unknown source can fairly be called his own. But at least they are his own, in the sense in which what is given to us is our own. Since he alone was the recipient of these thoughts, we may fairly conclude that he alone was fitted to receive them. Through him they were given to the world; and, by the world, they will ever be regarded as his.

Of the causes of this remarkable experience we know

practically nothing ; since what appears to produce it at one time, is found to be wholly ineffectual at another. Emerson enumerates no fewer than nine possible causes of inspiration ; if, indeed, that can truly be called a cause, which can never be relied upon for producing a given effect. The one mental condition which we know to be indispensable is receptivity ; the mind must be open to receive the stream of thought whenever, and however, it arises.

But if we know little of the exciting causes of inspiration, we know still less of its source. Whence comes this stream of thought ? Where does it take its rise ? It is remarkable that, of all the authors whose testimony has been cited, Shelley alone gives it as his opinion that it takes its rise in the author's own mind. He describes it as arising "from within" ; but as he adds, that "the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure," it is clear that he believes it to flow from some region of our nature which lies outside our consciousness. That there are such regions is indisputable. Every one is familiar with the experience that some memory, which has slumbered for years, may be suddenly awakened by the touch of association. And this suggests the probability that nothing which has ever formed a part of our experience is so entirely forgotten, that it could not be thus recalled. Now, the question naturally arises, Where do these memories slumber ? Clearly, in some part of the mental area which lies beyond the range of our consciousness ; and it seems not impossible that the sleeping-place of the memories may contain other mental treasures.

It may help to make this difficult subject clear, if we

compare our consciousness to a lighted candle, set in the middle of a dark room. The objects which come within its little circle of light are clearly visible, while those beyond it are shrouded in gloom. Within the circle lighted by our consciousness are the faculties, the thoughts, the memories, and the little store of knowledge, with which we are familiar. Within this circle, also, take place those variations of activity to which allusion has been made in an earlier part of this chapter. In the outer and darker circle lie the slumbering memories ; and, if Shelley is right, powers, thoughts, and other mental possessions of whose very existence we are unconscious.

Now, it is evident that, while the light of the candle does not, and never can, penetrate the gloom around, it would be quite possible for the objects shrouded in that gloom to change their position, and come within the circle of light. It is certainly something analogous to this, that occurs when the sleeping memory responds to the touch of association : it is brought within the range of our perceptions. Now, if the contents of the outer circle were to overflow into the inner—if the thoughts, the knowledge, the power, which lie beyond the reach of our consciousness, were suddenly to break in upon that consciousness, they would have every appearance of coming from some unknown outside source. They would produce exactly the experience which is called inspiration. The rush of thought which seems to the author to come from heaven may be, in reality, a sudden influx of the hidden treasures of his own mind.

Now, if this theory be true, many interesting conclusions follow from it. First, the author's highest

inspirations are, unquestionably, his own. Secondly, the mental possessions of whose existence we are unconscious, far exceed in value and importance those with which we are familiar. Shelley, as we have seen, describes this experience as "the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own"; and all agree in regarding it as something superhuman; that is, above what is recognised as belonging to human nature. It is impossible to forget that we owe to it, all that is highest in literature and art. But the subject is an obscure one, and it would perhaps be unprofitable to pursue it farther.

NOTE.—Since writing the above, it has been pointed out to me, that the hypothesis which I have ventured to put forward as a possible explanation of the phenomenon of Inspiration, is already a recognised psychological theory; and that the very thoughts which I have endeavoured to express, are to be found in the pages of Mr. William James's "Varieties of Religious Experience." I need hardly say, that I had read neither that book nor any other on the subject.—C.E.H.

CHAPTER XIV

THE AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE

Special value of experience to the author—1. His exclusive possession—2. It commands a hearing—3. It is often the sole source of knowledge, e.g., the subject of Love—Incapacity for experience—"The experiencing nature"—W. Bagehot—Characteristics of the artistic temperament—Absence of the artistic temperament, e.g., W. Scott—Compare "Waverley" with "Weir of Hermiston"—No genius can dispense with experience—Dante, Goëthe—Mrs. Browning—W. Bagehot on Shakespeare—"Wuthering Heights" the work of genius without experience—Last letter of R. L. Stevenson to Mr. Gosse.

"The poet writes from a real experience, the amateur feigns one. . . . If your verse has not a necessary and autobiographic basis, though under whatever gay poetic veils, it shall not waste my time."—EMERSON.

"The more knowledge a man has, the better he'll do 's work ; and feeling's a sort o' knowledge."—ADAM BEDE.

IN a former chapter we quoted the saying that the author's style is the only thing that he can call his own. This statement, however, is not strictly accurate. He has, or should have, another possession, quite as exclusively his own property, namely, his experience.

For several reasons, experience, valuable to all men, is especially necessary to the author. First, it is a

source of knowledge to which he alone has access. No man can share it with him, no man can take it from him ; he cannot even give it away, for experience is not transferable. To the man who desires to be original, this private store of knowledge is invaluable.

Secondly, experience will always command a hearing. The man whom all desire to listen to, is the man who *knows* ; and there is nothing which a man can know so thoroughly, as that which he has learned through his own experience.

This knowledge has come to him at first hand ; it has become a part of his very being. "Only so much do I know, as I have lived," says Emerson ; and he adds most truly, "Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not." Let a man bring to his fellows a message straight from life, and, whether he be poet, preacher, artist or author, he will have no lack of eager listeners.

Thirdly, in many matters of the highest moment, experience is the *only* source of knowledge. To the author, especially if he be poet or novelist, a knowledge of human nature is of the first importance ; and this can only come to him through experience. Observation will carry him but a very little way, especially if it be unenlightened by sympathy ; and sympathy, again, is the fruit of experience. The deeper secrets of the human heart are hidden from the observer. The only heart to whose secrets he has access is his own ; and not until he has mastered these, will he hold in his hand the key to the hearts of others.

Take, for example, the subject of Love. Apart from experience, what can any man know about it ? "It is a subject," says Robert Louis Stevenson, "in which

neither intuition nor the behaviour of others will help the philosopher to the truth. There is probably nothing rightly thought, or rightly written on this matter of love, that is not a piece of the person's experience."

Now, in nothing do men differ so widely as in their capacity for experience. Opportunities come and go, and, for the most part, leave men where they found them. Probably the experience of the greater number might be summed up in the proverb, "A burnt child dreads the fire." They are sufficiently aware of what has hurt them in the past, to be anxious to avoid it in the future; and there, their experience ends. They learn nothing more from life; they do not even know that there is anything more to be learned. They are not open to experience: the channels through which it enters the soul are wanting.

"To a great experience," says Walter Bagehot, "one thing is essential, an experiencing nature. It is not enough to have opportunity, it is essential to feel it. Some occasions come to all men; but to many they are of little use, and to some they are of none." It is probable that these last are men in whose lives the affections play a subordinate part. For the capacity for experience depends largely upon the capacity for affection; in other words, we learn life's lessons with the heart rather than with the head.

But the "experiencing nature" is also, to a great extent, a matter of temperament. Where there is any large measure of the artistic faculty, it is usually accompanied by the artistic or poetic temperament. Now, the main characteristic of this temperament is an extreme susceptibility to outward impressions. Every

perception is preternaturally acute, every feeling is intensified ; in a word, every avenue to the soul is open ; and hence, to a man of this temperament, nothing is indifferent. What is attractive attracts, what is repulsive repels, what is provoking excites anger and hatred, in a degree unknown to other men. Now, this gives an extraordinary vividness to all experience ; it is, as it were, burned into the soul, and it is never forgotten.

But the artistic temperament confers a further benefit upon its possessor. It endows him with what can only be described as the gift of perpetual youth. The ordinary man leaves childhood and youth behind him, till, as the years go on, they are lost in the distance. But the man of artistic temperament carries these with him ; to the end of his life they are never far from him ; and, in imagination, he lives through their fancies and feelings, their joys and sorrows, again and again. For artistic purposes, they are ever at hand ; for the past is as vividly real to him as the present, and he can live in the one as easily as in the other.

A striking example of the artist's vivid realisation of a long past experience, is furnished by George Eliot's description of the religious life of Dinah Morris ; and, in particular, by the sermon preached on the village green at Hayslope. No one can be insensible to the profound reality of the religion there portrayed ; and it has often been a matter of astonishment, that it could have proceeded from the pen of one, who had herself renounced all that is popularly known as religious belief. There is, however, no question that the reality of this picture draws its life from the past experience

of the authoress, and that, as she wrote, she was living once more through the fervid religious experiences of her impressionable girlhood. This illustrates the fact that the artist's experience is a storehouse, upon whose treasures he can draw at will.

But this is not all. Not only can he throw himself, at will, into the past, not only can he recall the feelings of youth in their first freshness, but the actual capacity for vivid and intense emotion is, in his case, indefinitely prolonged. He never reaches the age at which he is incapable of romantic love. The ordinary man, of middle age, looks back upon the love-episodes of his youth, with a mixture of shame and amusement; they are a bygone folly; he could not recall those feelings if he would; and, assuredly, he would not if he could. But to the poet, and, in a lesser degree, to all who share his temperament, love is the very flower and crown of life; to him, "Life, with all it yields of joy and woe, and hope and fear, . . . is just our chance of the prize of learning love"; and "The light of a whole life dies, when love is done."

This is the view of youth, but enlarged and intensified. To the young, the subject of love is of supreme interest; to the man of poetic temperament, it is of supreme interest all his life long. Were it not so, some of the finest love-poems in the language would never have been written. Youth is the time of love; but it is not usually the time when the author's powers reach their highest development. But for this prolongation of youth, the best powers of the artist would be separated from his most important subject by a wide gulf of years.

We have an instance of such a separation in the

case of Sir Walter Scott. It has already been pointed out that he was incapable of giving any lifelike representation of the passion of love; we have here the explanation of that incapacity. Richly endowed as he was with the artistic faculty, he was quite without the artistic temperament. He had had his share of experience: in youth he had more than one attachment; but he did not carry the feelings of youth into mature life; and, in consequence, when in middle age he found himself face to face with the necessity of portraying heroes, heroines and love-affairs, he was quite at a loss. His splendid powers and vast mental equipment were powerless here: what he wanted was youth, and the feelings which belong to that "entrancing age"; nothing else would serve his turn. But these were gone, and he could not recall them; they were as completely out of his reach as though they had never been.

It may serve to illustrate the difference between the non-artistic and the artistic temperament, if we compare the love-passages in "Waverley," Scott's first novel, written when he was forty-three, with those in "Weir of Hermiston," Stevenson's last piece of work, cut short by his premature death, at the age of forty-four. If there is one of Scott's heroes who has any individuality, that one is Edward Waverley. Yet how uninteresting, how commonplace and conventional, is his love for Flora MacIvor! It does not give the reader a single pleasurable sensation; nor, to speak truth, any sensation at all.

Let us now turn to "Weir of Hermiston," and the love of Archie and Christina. It is living, it is glowing, it is palpitating, it is magnetic; and its effect

upon the reader "makes good the ancient superstition of the hunter, that the bullet will hit the mark, which is first dipped in the marksman's blood."

We now come to the question, How far is genius able to dispense with experience? There is a prevalent opinion that in the man of genius intuition takes the place of actual knowledge;—that to him the perception of what *would be*, enables him to dispense with the knowledge of what *is*; and that, in consequence, he is independent of experience.

Now, without presuming to decide what is or is not possible to genius, we must, nevertheless, submit that this opinion is not borne out by facts; and that all the evidence which is accessible points in the opposite direction. For, first, the "experiencing nature" is the invariable accompaniment of genius; and Nature does not bestow her best gifts where they are likely to rust for want of use.

But further, the man of genius, so far as we have the opportunity of observing him, shows no disposition whatever to dispense with experience; on the contrary, he sets a high value upon it, as a source of otherwise unattainable knowledge. The best work of our great novelists is, as we have seen, based upon experience. Dante's experience has given to the world its finest love-poem, as well as much of the "Paradiso." Goëthe habitually, and most unscrupulously, played upon the affections of women, that he might gain experience in love. Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese" are nothing but a record of the several stages of her own love-story; and such examples might be multiplied *ad infinitum*. Of Shakespeare's life we know almost nothing, but, from the

study of his works, Walter Bagehot draws the following conclusion :—

“Shakespeare’s works,” he says, “could only be produced by a first-rate imagination working on a first-rate experience. It is often difficult to make out, whether the author of a poetic creation is drawing from fancy, or drawing from experience. But for Art on a certain scale, the two must concur. Out of nothing, nothing can be created. Some plastic power is required, however great may be the material. And when such a work as ‘Hamlet’ or ‘Othello,’ still more, when both of them and others not unequal, have been created by a single mind, it may be fairly said, that not only a great imagination, but a full conversancy with the world, was necessary to their production. The whole powers of man, under the most favourable circumstances, are not too great for such an effort. We may assume that Shakespeare had a great experience.”

Yet while it may be regarded as certain, that the knowledge as well as the wisdom of genius is in some sort derived from life, the *modus* of that derivation may be quite beyond our ken. “For the born artist,” says Mr. Henry James, “the faintest hints of life are converted into revelations.” The mind of the man of genius resembles some delicate piece of mechanism, which is susceptible to every atmospheric change. Or it may be compared to the sensitive photographic film, which captures, retains and reproduces much that is invisible to the ordinary eye. This goes far to account for the impression that genius is independent of experience. Moreover, when we consider how ceaselessly we are receiving impressions from without,

and that the capacity for reception is, in the born artist, multiplied an hundredfold, we recognise the probability that genius itself may occasionally attribute to intuition alone, that which had its real origin in actual life.

Charlotte Brontë believed that the character of Paulina was a purely imaginative creation; yet it is impossible to read the story of the childhood of the Brontë family, without perceiving that she had before her, in her young sisters, not to speak of her own character, all the main elements of that shy, sensitive, reserved, yet passionate nature.

We have an almost unique example of the workings of genius, when wholly uninformed by experience, in that very remarkable but painful book "Wuthering Heights." It is the opinion of competent critics that the genius of Emily Brontë far transcended that of her sister Charlotte; yet the love-passages in "Wuthering Heights" will not bear comparison with those in "Villette." They are more than unnatural, they are positively inhuman. It would seem, then, that genius, even when reinforced by passion, requires to be enlightened by experience. It was not that the "experiencing nature" was wanting,—in this none of the Brontës were deficient;—but that the opportunities which would have furnished food for that nature were wholly absent.

There is a very interesting passage, in the last letter written by Stevenson to Mr. Edmund Gosse, which bears upon the effect of temperament on literary work. Speaking of the inevitable advance of years, he says :—

“You take the change gallantly ; not I, I must confess. . . . I was not born for age. And, curiously enough, I seem to see a contrary drift in my work, from that which is so remarkable in yours. You are going on sedately, travelling through your ages, decently changing with the years to the proper tune. And here am I, quite out of my true course, and with nothing in my foolish, elderly head, but love-stories. This must repose upon some curious distinction of Temperament.”

Here we have the artist himself, contemplating, (not without a certain whimsical wonder), the qualities which differentiate him from his fellow-men, and laying his finger upon their cause.

CHAPTER XV

LITERATURE AS A PROFESSION

An important question—Considerations which determine the answer—Reasons against making literature a means of livelihood—Schopenhauer on writing for money—Either the author or his work must suffer—Carlyle's early struggles—Greatness a bar to immediate success—A second occupation necessary—The true book born not made—The author's responsibility.

"Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath." — THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

OUR last chapter is concerned with the young author, as he stands on the threshold of his career. He has spent much time and pains upon his own education and training ; he has much to say, and he is not only able to say it, but he has a strong impulse to express himself in writing. At this point, he finds himself face to face with an important question : Shall he, or shall he not, make literature his profession ?

Now, if he possesses private means, or if he is able to remain under the shelter of his father's roof, while he is trying his wings, this question is not of vital moment. But if, on the contrary, he finds himself obliged to go out into the world and carve out a path for himself,

he may well pause and reflect before coming to a decision.

In considering this question, much will depend upon the point of view from which he regards literature and literary work. If it is his first object to push his way in the world—if he regards his powers as so much saleable property, to be offered to the highest bidder, he may earn a livelihood by his pen without any great difficulty, though not without danger to his work. This will inevitably suffer, but he himself may attain what the world calls success.

If, on the other hand, he regards the literary career as the highest of all callings—if his heart is set, not upon his own profit and advancement, but upon the perfection of his work—he will decide the momentous question in the negative. He will not make literature his profession; that is, he will not make it his sole means of livelihood. For in the majority of cases, when literature begins by being a profession, it never rises to the dignity of an art.

The author who writes for a livelihood must, almost inevitably, confine himself at the outset to journalism, or contributions to periodicals, whereas his special powers may point in a totally different direction. He must, in short, write “pot-boilers,” and the “pot-boiler” is not the best preparation for the higher forms of literary work. Moreover, all work which brings in prompt payment must be finished and sent in by a given time; and this, of itself, makes the highest work impossible. The process of thinking is often a slow one: our best thoughts do not permit themselves to be hurried; they will make their appearance when they are ready, and not before. We are compelled to wait

their pleasure ; and, while we are waiting, the manuscript must go to press.

Again : it is all-important that the mind of the author should be free from care and anxiety ; and this cannot be, when the means of livelihood are precarious.

Let the intending author earn his daily bread by any honest means rather than by his pen. He will still be able to give his spare time to literary work. This will involve some self-denial ; it may make his life "all work and no play" ; but many of us are obliged to choose between work and play, and, by those who love their work, the choice is easily made. He may grudge the hours spent upon his daily calling ; he may think his literary work would gain if he could give his whole time to it ; and so, indeed, it might, if this did not introduce the fatal necessity of writing for money.

On this subject Schopenhauer has the following passage :—

"Writing for money . . . is, at bottom, the ruin of literature. No one writes anything that is worth writing, unless he writes entirely for the sake of his subject. It seems as though the money lay under a curse ; for every author degenerates as soon as he begins to put pen to paper, in any way for the sake of gain. The best works of the greatest men, all come from the time when they had to write for nothing, or for very little."

"But," it may be objected, "surely many of our greatest writers have begun their career by making literature their sole means of livelihood ; yet it cannot be said that their work has suffered." If this be an accurate statement of fact, it admits of but one explanation. They *were* great ; and the great writer

will sacrifice anything rather than the quality of his work.

But if their work did not suffer, they themselves often suffered much. Take the case of Carlyle, who is considered, and rightly, a typical example of the author who would starve rather than give to the world anything less than his best. When, in 1818, he gave up his tutorship and repaired to Edinburgh to take up literature as a profession, he had £90 in hand ; and this, with his frugal habits, would suffice to keep the wolf from the door for many months. It did not, however, last long enough ; and for three years he struggled on, in poverty and obscurity, eating his own heart, as he tells us, and full of misgivings lest there should soon be nothing else to eat ; receiving the merest pittance for his contributions to the "Edinburgh Encyclopædia," and obliged to eke out these scanty earnings by taking private pupils. Not until 1823 did he find an opening for his real powers in the *London Magazine*.

Yet Carlyle had great gifts, and a strong literary bent ; no one can doubt that, in embracing the author's career, he was undertaking the very work for which he was born.

But, in truth, greatness itself is often a serious bar to immediate success. When an original writer first makes his appearance, he is not immediately recognised by the world. For the world has seen nothing like him before, and does not know what to think of him. It requires to be told what to think ; and those who are able to tell it are few, and widely scattered. For it is only the small minority who are themselves capable of original thinking, who at once recognise originality ;

and it is usually some time before these can make their voices heard. In the meanwhile, the author who is so unfortunate as to depend for his daily bread upon the world's recognition, must inevitably starve. The greater the author, therefore, the more imperative is his need of some second occupation, by which he can maintain himself while he is waiting for literary success.

But to return. Apart from the question of writing for a livelihood, there can be no doubt that the magazine offers the best opening to the young author; since it enables him to enter upon his career without either outlay or risk. It would be an interesting question how many of our great authors began their literary life by writing for periodicals. The names of De Quincey, Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, George Eliot, and Robert Louis Stevenson rise at once to the memory.

The author must not be too greatly discouraged, if his early efforts find no favour in the eyes of editor or publisher. This experience is all but universal. Probably none escape it, unless it be the writer of the short story, or the author who is so fortunate as to have personal knowledge of some subject, which at the moment, is engaging public attention.

The intending author will be told by his friends, that every magazine has its staff of regular contributors, and that without interest it is impossible that he should secure a hearing. This, however, is not the fact. The greater number of magazines invite contributions from all sources. The editor is as anxious to find suitable contributors, as the contributors are to be found. It is no real advantage to the author to have friends

at court. No honest editor accepts articles from motives of personal friendship ; nor, should he do so, would such success be worth having. If his early contributions are rejected, the author will redouble his efforts. He will resolve to persevere, until his work is so excellent that it must command a hearing. Really good work, if rejected in one quarter, is certain to be accepted in another.

It has been our object, in the foregoing pages, not so much to show how books are made, as how literature is born, and that it is the natural growth and outcome of the human mind. The true book is not pieced together like a mosaic ; it grows, develops, and comes to maturity like any other organism. The author himself could give but a very imperfect account of the manner in which his book came into existence. To him it appears that he took his subject, then a small seed, into his hand ; and that he has done little since but watch its growth, report its progress, and describe the several stages of its development. Once more, we reiterate that no true author ever made the contents of his book : they existed, in some form or other, before they came into his hands ; he sought them, found them, gave them shape, and offered them to the world.

This view of the origin of literature is not without a historic basis. The wandering minstrel of the Middle Ages, who was poet, historian and biographer in one, was the Troubadour—that is, the Trouveur, or Finder. His lineal descendant, the author of to-day, follows in his footsteps. He is first, a Seeker ; secondly, a Finder ; lastly, a Revealer.

On the subject of the author's responsibility, much has been implied, although little has been actually said,

in the preceding pages. The last thought that we would leave with our readers, is that the author's gifts are not his own, to use or misuse as he pleases, but that

"Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do,
 Not light them for themselves ; for if our virtues
 Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
 As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd
 But to fine issues ; nor Nature never lends
 The smallest scruple of her excellence,
 But, like a thrifty goddess, She determines
 Herself the glory of a creditor,
 Both thanks and use."

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF AUTHORS QUOTED OR REFERRED TO

	PAGES						
Arnold, Matthew	52
Bagehot, W....	5, 45, 51, 99,	104	
Beethoven	88
Brontë, C. 47, 48, 69, 93,	105	
Brontë, E.	105
Brown, Dr. John	38
Browning, E. B.	103
Browning, R.	63
Bryce (Professor)	45
Buffon	50
Carlyle, T.	4, 36, 37, 59, 69, 78, 80, 82, 110, 111				
Dante...	103
De Quincey	30, 111
Dickens 40, 43,	111
Disraeli, Isaac	52
Edgeworth, Maria	93
Eliot, George	17, 48, 88, 93, 97, 100,	111		
Emerson	25, 27, 30, 31, 32, 35, 62, 64, 65, 78, 83, 92, 97, 98						
Ewing, J. H....	32
Fénélon	52
Gaskell, Mrs.	13, 37
Goëthe	37, 103
Gosse, Edmund	105
Gracian, Balthazar	67
Green, J. R.	16

116 LIST OF AUTHORS REFERRED TO

						PAGES
Hay (Colonel), John	...	...	...	...	...	71
Herbert, George	...	...	...	...	...	61
Herrick	...	...	...	...	...	92
Howitt, William and Mary	...	...	...	...	...	37
Hunt, William	...	...	...	1, 11, 34, 35,	72, 74, 77, 78	
James, Henry	...	...	...	...	...	104
James, William	...	...	...	...	...	96
Johnson, Dr....	...	...	...	...	...	12, 82
Joubert, Josef	...	...	...	...	4, 23, 28, 31, 59	
Keats ...	...	...	...	...	...	22
Kingsley, Charles	...	...	...	...	...	9, 54
Kipling, Rudyard	...	...	...	...	...	43, 70
Lamb, Charles	...	...	...	...	...	30
Meredith, George	...	...	...	...	...	9
Miller, Hugh	...	...	...	...	...	37
Norris, Frank	...	...	...	...	...	6
Pater, Walter	...	...	...	...	...	55
Plato ...	...	...	...	...	...	16, 30
Ruskin	...	...	...	...	...	19, 38
Schopenhauer	...	...	53, 56, 61, 64, 78, 83, 85, 86, 109			
Scott, Sir W.	...	...	...	...	9, 12, 102	
Shakespeare...	...	...	...	103, 104, 107, 113		
Shelley	...	...	...	...	91, 94, 95, 96	
Sidney, Sir Philip	...	...	...	...	...	32
Socrates	...	...	...	...	...	30
Stevenson, R. L.	...	6, 8, 11, 16, 20, 21, 22, 25, 38, 47, 82, 92, 102, 105, 111				
Tennyson	...	...	...	...	...	84
Thackeray	...	...	...	...	...	111
Wordsworth...	...	...	...	...	...	86, 93

INDEX OF SUBJECTS

ART.

	PAGES
The only art that has no professors	1
Works of art true to life and fact	6
No true art without unity	43
The technique only can be taught	54
All that is best in art due to inspiration	93, 96

ARTISTIC OR POETIC TEMPERAMENT.

Characteristics of	99
The poet's view of love	101
Difference between artistic and non-artistic tempera- ment	102

AUTHOR.

Every author self-taught	2
Qualifications of author	4
The author a truth-teller	5
„ „ a truth-lover	5
The spurious author	60
The author who is born, not made... ..	66, 68
Every author a teacher	18
• „ „ a learner	18
The author's objects	50, 56, 65
The author a "Trouveur," or "Finder"	112
The author's responsibility	112

EXPERIENCE—*continued.*

	PAGES
R. L. Stevenson on the experience of love	98
Incapacity for experience	99
The "experiencing nature"	99, 103, 105
No genius can dispense with experience	103
"Wuthering Heights" the work of genius without experience	105

EXPRESSION.

Ready-made expressions to be avoided	84
The author must make his own expressions	84

FINISH.

The process of revision	72
--------------------------------	----

FORCE.

Force as a branch of style	66
The true nature of force	67
Sources of force	68
Example of forcible writing	71

FRIENDS.

Education carried on by	76
Subjects suggested by	37, 38
Discouragement from	III

INSPIRATION.

The special endowment of the poet and man of genius	88, 91
An influx of power from without	90
The experience described	90
Its intermittent character	91
Testimony of Shelley, Herrick, Emerson, and R. L. Stevenson	91, 92
Evidences in literature of its presence or absence	93
Its source	94

INSTRUCTION.

	PAGES
Hard to obtain,...	2
No artist can dispense with ...	54

LITERATURE.

Literature the offspring of both head and heart ...	9
Necessity of distinguishing between good and bad in literature ...	20
The true and the false defined ...	36
Producers of literature ...	26
Literature as a profession. The question discussed	107-110
Literature born, not made ...	112

MANUSCRIPTS.

Re-writing of ...	15, 16
Rejection of ...	111

MATERIALS.

Management of materials laborious ...	40
Materials drawn from life or from written sources	41, 47
Collection and classification ...	41
Selection and rejection ...	42
Treatment ...	45
Material must undergo a change in the author's mind ...	46
Rearrangement of materials ...	83

METAPHOR.

Use of ...	64
Mixed metaphors ...	64

OBJECT of the Volume ...	2, 112
--------------------------	--------

OBSCURITY.

Causes of ...	57, 60
Obscurity suggestive of hidden treasure ...	61

ORIGINALITY.

	PAGES
Inquiry into the nature of	79
Qualities inseparable from	80
Novelty not essential to	80
Dangers to	81
Carlyle on the original man	81
Originality a gift	82
Methods of cultivation	83, 84
Original writers not immediately recognised	110

PERIODICALS.

On writing for	108, 111
Exclusive reading of	55

PLAGIARISM.

What it is not	85
What it is	86
Examples	86, 87

POWERS.

Variations in	13, 27, 29, 89
Limits of	89

READING.

Reading for education	17
„ „ enjoyment	51
„ „ information	41, 51
„ to stimulate thought	30
„ „ cultivate style	54, 55
Ruskin on reading	19

SENTENCES.

Arrangement of words in a sentence	63
Opening sentences	74
Concluding sentences	76

STYLE.

	PAGES
Value and importance of	50
Definitions of style	52
Source of	52
What the term includes	53
Style infectious	55
May be cultivated	53

SUBJECT.

Man of many subjects	33
„ „ one subject	33
„ „ no subject	34
The search for a subject	
Wrong principle	34
Right principle... ..	
New views of old subjects	36
Total ignorance of subject chosen	36
Subjects suggested by friends	37, 38
Ruskin on the author's true subject	38
Bird's-eye view of subject	13, 43
Subject at the mercy of the author	51
The author follows his subject where it leads	27, 75

THINKING.

Definition of	26
A slow process... ..	27, 108
Joubert on thinking	28
Methods of original thinker	83

THOUGHT.

Solitude necessary to profound thought	28
Thought stimulated by contact with other minds	29, 89
Language the "incarnation of thought"	84
Difficulty of distinguishing one's own thoughts from	
those of others	80, 85
Thought, a perception of truth	86

TRUTH.

	PAGES
Truth in fiction	5
Truth-seeking	26

UNITY.

Artistic, principle of	43
The result of singleness of purpose	44

WORDS.

Principle on which author chooses his words	62
Words essential or pernicious	74

WORK.

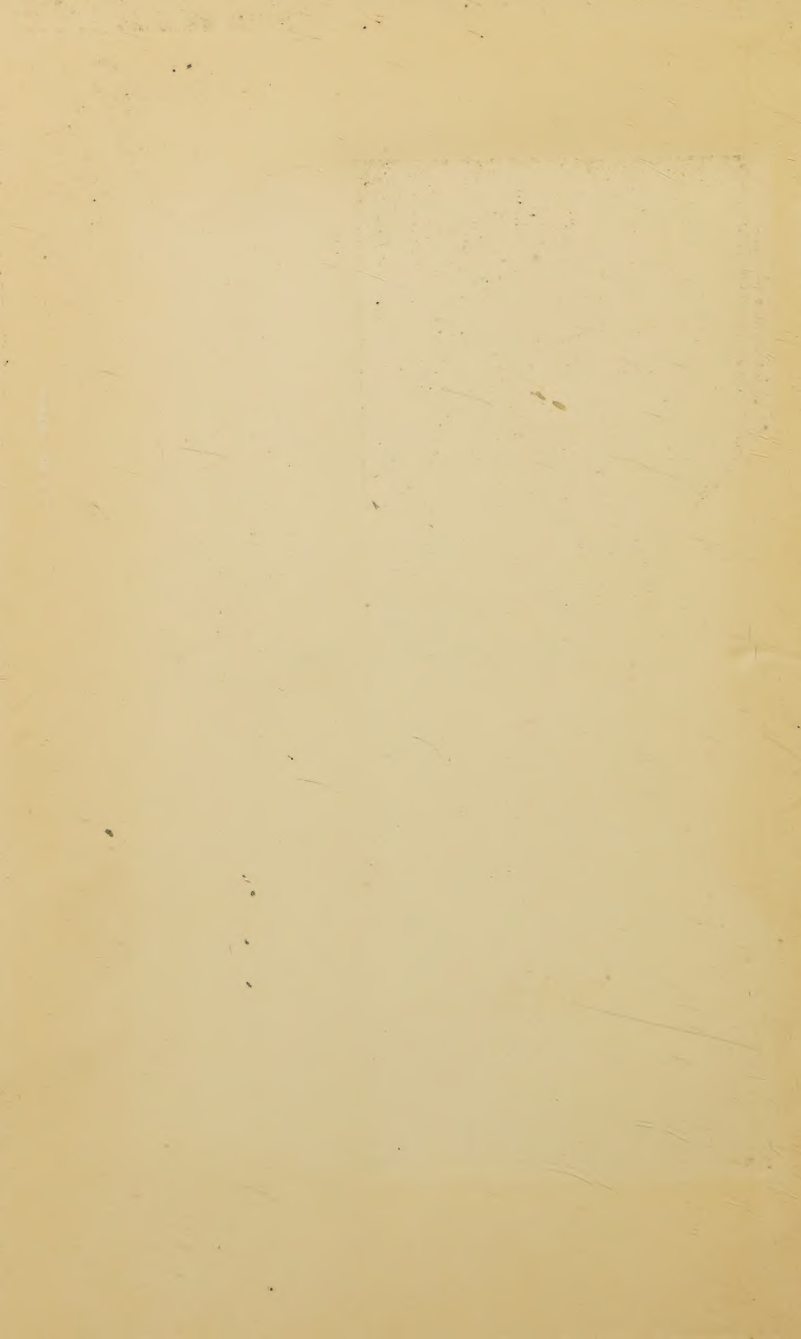
Relation between love of work and its excellence ...	7
Talent no substitute for work	11
Work accomplished by Sir W. Scott	12
How to set to work	12
R. L. Stevenson on doing good work	16

WRITING.

How R. L. Stevenson learned to write	21
Writing what will "not do"	13
Writing upon facts	23, 36
„ for money	7, 108

Elliot Stock, Paternoster Row, London.

S. I



Sage Library.

Injury of Books subject the Offender
to the Penalty of the Law.

EXTRACT FROM RULES.

1 Any person abusing the privileges of the library by unbecoming conduct by violation of anyone of the regulations shall be liable to be excluded from the use of the Library.

2 No person shall be permitted to take a book from the library while any fines imposed on such person remain unpaid

Call No.

808H362

KEEP YOUR CARD IN
THIS POCKET.

